



BHARATA AND THE LIONESS

THE GOLDEN SERIES

A BOOK OF GOLDEN TALES

BY

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WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

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NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

These tales are selected from 'Indian Heroes', 'Tales from the Indian Epics', 'King Vikrama' and 'Tales of the Saints of Pandharpur', and the book is designed to give in compact form the most popular of the stories included in each of those books.

SATYAVAN AND SAVITRI

I

ONCE upon a time there ruled over the Madva people a great king called Asvapati, or lord of horses. His subjects loved him, his fame was great and his riches immense. But he was not wholly happy, because he had no children. As he grew older his longing for children increased. And he fervently worshipped Brahmadeva's queen, the goddess Savitri, and became an anchorite that he might win her favour. For eighteen years he worshipped her, until at last he won her favour and she vouchsafed him a vision. Out of a sacrificial fire which he had built up for her, she rose in all her splendour and glory. 'O King Asvapati,' she said, 'O Lord of Horses, for eighteen years I have watched your piety and your pure life. I have vouchsafed you this vision in order that you may ask me a boon. Ask me a boon, therefore, and whatever it is, unless it is something evil, I shall willingly grant it to you.'

'Great goddess,' said King Asvapati, 'I long for children. I have practised austerities and worshipped at your shrine that you might grant me them. If, therefore, you are pleased with me, graciously grant me this boon.'

'O king,' said Savitri, 'I knew your desires before you told them to me. Before I left Brahmagiri I entreated the Lord Brahmadeva on your behalf. He has graciously listened to my entreaties and has promised me that soon a beautiful daughter shall be born to you. This is the Lord Brahma-

deva's command. But do not thank him, for he has no need of a mortal's thanks.' 'So be it,' said the king reverently and with bowed head. When he lifted his eyes Savitri had vanished.

A year later the king's eldest queen, Malavi, bore him a beautiful little baby girl, and, because the goddess Savitri had vouchsafed her birth in answer to the king's prayers, he and Queen Malavi called the little girl Savitri. As the years passed by Savitri grew into the most lovely maiden in all the land of the Aryas. Her father's subjects adored her as if she were a goddess. But her tall form and imperious beauty so awed the young princes of India that none came forward to ask for her hand. King Asvapati grieved that no suitor wooed his beautiful maid. At last he sent for Savitri. 'My daughter,' he said, 'you are a grown woman and it is time for you to marry. But no suitor comes to win you. Go, therefore, through the land of the Aryas and seek some youth fit to be your husband. Savitri, blushing deeply, took leave of the king. In a short time the king's charioteer drove a golden chariot up to the door of her palace, and, seated in it, and accompanied by wise ministers and horse soldiers with glittering lances, she journeyed in turn to the various shrines and holy places of India.

She was absent for several months. In her absence the sage Narada visited the court of Asvapati, king of the Madvas. The king greeted the great sage with befitting reverence, and king and anchorite were talking together when a royal messenger announced that the Princess Savitri had returned, and was driving through the outer gates of the royal palace. The sage Narada asked the king

where she had been and why he did not wed her to some Aryan hero. 'For that very purpose,' answered the king, 'I sent her away. She will now announce to me whom she has chosen for her husband.' Just then the princess entered the royal hall and the king bade her tell him on what hero her love had fallen. The princess blushed and said, with a smile that made her lovelier than before, 'O King Asvapati, my father, there ruled some years ago in the land of the Salyas a noble king named Dyumatsena. But while still in the prime of life, and while his son was but a tiny child, the king's eyes failed him and he became blind. Hearing of this a neighbouring king, over whom King Dyumatsena had in earlier years triumphed, sought his revenge. He suddenly attacked the land of the Salyas, overthrew the king's army and forced King Dyumatsena to flee, with his queen and the little prince, to the forest. There King Dyumatsena became a hermit and renounced the world. For eighteen years he has lived there with his wife and son. And now the son, Satyavan by name, has grown to splendid manhood. I have seen him and I love him, and he alone shall be my husband.'

So saying, the lovely princess bowed before her father and the great sage Narada, until her head touched their feet.

'Alas!' exclaimed Narada, 'Alas! Your daughter, O king, has made but a foolish choice.' 'Venerable sage,' said the king anxiously, 'is not Prince Satyavan wise and brave; tender-hearted and handsome?' 'He is indeed,' said Narada. 'Prince Satyavan is as wise as Brihaspati, as brave as the god Shiva, as tender-hearted as Mother Earth, and as beautiful

as an eastern moon. But he has one defect which outweighs all his virtues. Exactly one year from today Prince Satyavan's life will come to a close.'

'O my daughter,' cried King Asvapati, 'choose another husband. For if you wed Satyavan, in a few months you will be a widow.'

'No, my father,' said Savitri, 'my love once given can never be given to another. I have chosen Prince Satyavan to be my husband. I love him and him only will I wed.' The courage of the beautiful maid touched the sage's heart. 'O king,' he said, 'the maid will never wed anyone but Satyavan. Let her, therefore, have him for her husband.' The king bowed before Narada and said, 'Venerable sir, as you will, so shall it be!' The same day Narada took his leave and King Asvapati began to prepare for his daughter's wedding. On an auspicious day he gathered round him the wisest Brahmins of the realm, and, taking his daughter with him, set out in his chariot for the hermitage of King Dyumatsena. When they reached the forest, he left his chariot and walked on foot until he found King Dyumatsena seated on a mat of kusa grass in the shade of a teak tree. King Asvapati bowed and told the royal hermit who he was. And King Dyumatsena offered him a cow from his herd way of welcome. King Asvapati took the gift and by in return told King Dyumatsena the object of his coming. King Dyumatsena at first demurred. 'How will your daughter,' he asked, 'bear the hardships of the forest? In the old days when I was king of the Salyas I would gladly have accepted your offer. But today, when I am but a forest hermit, how can I?' 'No,' answered King Asvapati, 'I have set

my heart on the marriage; therefore do not thwart me.' 'If that be so,' replied King Dyumatsena, 'let the wedding be this very day.' King Asvapati agreed. The two kings called together the Brahmins who had followed King Asvapati and those who lived in the hermitage, and that very day they united Satyavan, the prince of the Salyas, with Savitri the beautiful princess of the Madvas.

II

Wedded to Satyavan, Savitri cast aside her ornaments and her silken garments, and clothed herself in bark and coarse red rags, so that she might not shame King Dyumatsena and those round him with her finery. She soon won the love of her husband's people, and she gave herself wholly to her husband and thought of nothing else all day long but how to please him. But a dark cloud hung over her happiness, for she could not forget the words which the sage Narada had uttered, namely that Prince Satyavan must die within a year. At last the appointed time was only three days off, and Savitri, in the hope of moving the immortals, vowed that she would touch no food until Prince Satyavan had survived the hour fixed for his death. At last the day itself dawned. Savitri worshipped the sun and the fire blazing on the hearth. Then she bowed to all the Brahmins of the king's household, and to King Dyumatsena and to her mother-in-law, and they in turn blessed her, saying, 'Daughter, may the gods grant that you never lose your husband.' Then they pressed her to eat. But she again repeated her vow

to let nothing pass her lips until Satyavan's hour of peril was over. Suddenly the prince rose, and taking a hatchet set out for the forest. Instantly Savitri rose too. 'Wait, my husband,' she said, 'let me go with you. Today I cannot leave you.' Satyavan sought to dissuade her. 'You are weak with fasting,' he said, 'and the paths are steep and rugged.' But Savitri's love for the prince overcame her weakness, and she begged him earnestly not to forbid her. Satyavan at last consented, but told her to bid the king and queen farewell, for he was afraid that she might die of fatigue in the forest. Savitri did so, and explained to them that she could not abandon Satyavan on his last day of life. Nor could she beg him not to go into the forest, for he said that he wished to cut wood for the sacrificial fire. The king and queen understood, and, blessing her, they bade her care for Satyavan. Savitri went back to the prince and the two entered the woods. And the prince pointed out to Savitri the stream sparkling in the sunlight and the flowering shrubs, and the peacocks that looked down upon them from the boughs of tall, leafy trees. But Savitri's heart was heavy. And, although her lips answered Satyavan, her thoughts dwelt always on his coming peril. The prince, thinking nothing of his danger, climbed into the trees and plucked their fruit, and with his hatchet he cut down boughs for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his head, his limbs began to ache, and sweat stood out upon his body. Slowly he walked back towards Savitri. And Savitri seeing his illness, ran to him and made him lie down, and taking his head in her lap, bade him sleep and rest. The prince was soon unconscious.

But Savitri, who knew that the hour of danger had come, looked anxiously about her. Soon she saw by her side a giant of monstrous aspect. His face was black and yellow. His eyes were bloodshot, his clothes were red, and in his hand was a mighty noose, and he wore a huge gold and jewelled crown that flashed back the rays of the sun. Savitri guessed that he was Death, come to claim her husband. Bravely she moved the prince's head from her lap to the ground, and, rising to her full height, she faced the giant. Joining her hands together she said with a trembling voice, 'My lord, from your mighty form I know you to be no mortal, but a god. Tell me who you are and what you desire?'

'I am Yama, the god of Death,' answered the giant. 'The prince's hours were numbered from his birth, and with the noose in my hand I shall bind him and drag him away.' 'Lord Yama,' replied Savitri, 'how is it that you have yourself come to drag away Satyavan, and not, as is your custom, sent one of your messengers?' 'A prince so great and so noble as Satyavan,' said Yama, 'deserved that I should come in person to take him away.'

With these words he bound with his noose the helpless form of the prince and began to drag him away towards the south. Savitri, stricken with grief, followed. A few minutes later Yama turned round and saw that she followed. 'Go back, princess,' he said. 'You must return home now, and there honour the dead prince with the last rites.'

Savitri faced the god bravely and said, 'The wise have said that by walking but seven paces together one contracts friendship with another. Thus I have become your friend. Listen, therefore,

I pray you, to what I say. It is my duty to follow my husband wherever you take him, even if I go to my death also. For true happiness lies in wedlock, and neither celibacy nor widowhood equal it in merit.'

Yama was touched by Savitri's words and replied, 'Princess, I, too, consider myself your friend. Ask me, therefore, for any boon you will, except only the life of your husband, and I shall grant it to you.' 'Lord Yama,' said the princess, 'my father-in-law is blind. Graciously give him back his sight. That is the boon that I ask of you.' 'Princess,' said Yama, 'I grant you the boon. King Dyumatsena will recover his sight.'

But Savitri still followed. Shortly afterwards King Yama turned and saw her. 'Princess, you are wearied with walking. Turn back home, I beg of you. For you will gain nothing by journeying further.' 'Lord Yama,' answered Savitri, 'I feel no fatigue while I stay with my husband, and where he goes there also shall I go. For Satyavan was a virtuous prince, and the wise have said that but a single day spent with the virtuous is a great gain. So I desire to spend all my life in his company.'

Yama's heart was again touched by Savitri's words. 'Princess, your words are full of wisdom and they please me. Ask of me, therefore, a second boon. And if it is not Satyavan's life I shall grant it to you.' 'Lord Yama,' answered the princess, 'my father-in-law, King Dyumatsena, through his blindness lost his kingdom. The second boon that I ask of you is this: grant that the king, my father-in-law, may recover his kingdom.' 'Princess,' replied King Yama, 'your boon is granted and

Dyumatsena will soon be ruling happily over the kingdom of the Salyas. But now I pray you to return homewards. For you are very weary.

But still Savitri followed King Yama. And he again asked why she did not turn back. 'Lord Yama,' said the princess, 'even righteous mortals show mercy to their enemies when they seek their protection. You are a god and you have declared yourself my friend. It is proper for you therefore to show me mercy.' 'Indeed, I will gladly show you mercy,' answered King Yama, 'but I cannot grant you Satyavan's life. Ask me another boon and I shall grant it to you.' 'As you will, Lord Yama,' said Savitri. 'The boon that I ask for is this. My father, King Asvapati, has no son. Grant that he may have a hundred sons.' 'I grant you the boon,' said King Yama, 'and now I pray you retrace your steps.'

But Savitri still followed King Yama. Once again King Yama turned back and pressed her to go homewards. 'Lord Yama,' said the princess, 'you have shown me kindness and you have shown me mercy. But you are the Lord of Justice and it is for you now to show me justice. I therefore beg of you, my lord—Satyavan.' 'O princess,' said King Yama, 'the life of Prince Satyavan I cannot give you. Ask me any other boon and it shall be yours.' 'I thank you, Lord Yama,' answered Savitri, 'and the boon that I ask is this: grant that I may bear to Prince Satyavan a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as he was.'

'O princess,' said King Yama, 'I grant you this boon, but I cannot grant you any more. So turn back homeward and do not weary yourself

in vain by following a dead husband.' 'No, Lord Yama,' said Savitri—and her wan face lit up with a smile of triumph—'the boon which you have just granted me cannot take effect unless you give me back Satyavan. You are an immortal and righteous, and you will not let your words prove false. Therefore, give me back Satyavan, so that I may bear him a hundred sons.'

King Yama thought deeply, but he could see no escape from the snare into which the brave princess had taken him. At last he said, 'So be it, Princess. I set free your husband. You will bear him a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as he himself is. And I add to the boons which I have given you yet another. You shall both live for four hundred years.'

With these words King Yama unbound Prince Satyavan, and, leaving him lying on the ground, departed immediately to his kingdom far away in the south. But Savitri went up to her husband's body, and, sitting down beside him once more, placed his head on her lap. In a short time he awoke and looked round him, not knowing where he was. At last he said, 'O Savitri, I have slept long. Why did you not wake me? Where is the monster that was dragging me away?' 'Dear lord,' said Savitri, 'Yama, King of Death, came to take you away. He has gone. So let us hasten homewards, for night has fallen.' But Satyavan's wits were still wandering. 'Tell me what happened to me,' he said. 'I fell asleep and then I dreamt that it grew dark and that a giant with a shining crown seized me. I can remember no more. Tell me whether there was any truth in my dream.'

‘Dear lord,’ said Savitri, ‘the night has fallen, let us hasten home. Tomorrow I shall tell you all that happened while you slept.’

But the prince looked around him and saw that the night was dark, and bade Savitri stay where they were until sunrise. ‘As you will, dear lord,’ said the princess. ‘There is a forest fire on the hills and by its light we can guide our steps. But if you wish to spend the night where we are, I shall kindle a fire here, and we can pass the hours happily until dawn.’ Of a sudden Prince Satyavan thought of his parents. ‘Dear princess,’ he said, ‘we must go home. My mind was clouded with sleep and I forgot my father and mother. I am their only hope and happiness. They will be torn with anxiety because of my absence. Let us hurry home as quickly as we can.’ Savitri consented, and, as her husband was still weak from his long trance, she took his hatchet in her right hand and supported him with her left. And thus helping him she led him home.

But King Dyumatsena and his wife Queen Saiva were roaming about, searching in vain for Satyavan. For they were very much afraid that some evil had befallen their only son. His eyesight had returned to King Dyumatsena, just as King Yama had promised the Princess Savitri. But, distracted by his fears for Satyavan, he felt no joy in it, and searched in every direction to find some trace of him. Every time a twig cracked or a leaf fell, he looked up joyfully saying, ‘Satyavan and Savitri have come back,’ and a moment later he would groan, finding out his error. The Brahmins of his household strove to pacify him, and in a

measure had succeeded, when suddenly Satyavan and Savitri came up to him unobserved. After the king had greeted them, the Brahmins lit a fire and all sat round it. Then the Brahmins questioned Satyavan, saying, 'O prince, why did you loiter so late in the forest, causing such pain to your father and mother.' 'Reverend sirs,' answered the prince. 'I can tell you but little. While I was cutting wood in the forest my head began suddenly to ache. Then I fell asleep and slept longer than I have ever slept before.' But the Brahmins turned to Savitri and said, 'Wise princess, tell us what you know. For we are greatly astonished. Prince Satyavan has never stayed away so long before. And in his absence King Dyumatsena's eyesight returned to him.'

Savitri answered, 'Venerable sages, the wise Narada foretold that my husband would die today. On that account I did not leave him. But, as he has told you, he fell asleep after cutting some wood. As he slept, King Yama appeared, bound him with a noose and began to drag him away to his own kingdom in the south. But I spoke to King Yama gently, and pleased him. He therefore gave me five boons. He promised that King Dyumatsena would recover his eyesight and regain his kingdom. He promised that my father, King Asvapati, would beget a hundred sons. He promised that I should bear Prince Satyavan a hundred sons. And he promised that the prince and I should each live four hundred years.'

After Savitri had ended her tale, they all rose and went to their huts and slept until the sun rose. A few hours after sunrise, King Dyumatsena saw a

great multitude approaching his hermitage. He came out of his hut and asked their business. 'O king,' they said, 'we are men from the kingdom of the Salyas. We have come to tell you that your enemy has been killed by his minister, and with him have perished also his sons and his kinsmen and his followers. Therefore, O king, come back to the land of the Salyas. For we have thrown off the yoke of the foreigner and we wish you, blind though you are, to rule over us.'

'My people,' said King Dyumatsena, 'I will gladly return to your land and reign over you. And I am no longer blind. The immortals have given me back my sight.' When the multitude heard this they were delighted. And they bowed to the earth before him and bade him hasten back to their land and rule over them as their king. That very day King Dyumatsena and Queen Saiva, with Prince Satyavan and Princess Savitri, were borne in palankeens from the forest to the chief city of the Salya people. There the Brahmins installed Dyumatsena as king and Prince Satyavan as his successor. And King Asvapati's queen, Malavi, bore him a hundred sons. And Savitri bore to Prince Satyavan a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as their father. And Prince Satyavan and Savitri became in due course king and queen of the Salya people, and ruled over them until they were four hundred years old. Then they passed gently away, and their subjects sorrowed over them for many a year.

THE TALE OF THE POLE STAR

ONCE upon a time there lived a great king in India whose name was Uttanpad. He had two wives, one named Suniti and the other Suruchi. The former had a beautiful nature and the latter a beautiful face. And, just like other kings in other parts of the world, King Uttanpad neglected the queen with the beautiful nature to grow every day more in love with the queen with the beautiful face.

Now by Suruchi, King Uttanpad had a little boy called Uttam, and by Suniti he had a little boy called Dhruv. Uttam was six and Dhruv was five, and each of them inherited the qualities of his mother. King Uttanpad loved them both, but because of Suruchi's jealousy he dared not fondle Dhruv in her presence. One day the king was telling the two little boys a story and had Dhruv on his knee. Queen Suruchi entered the room, and, furious at the sight, gave Dhruv a push so that he fell over backwards. Prince Dhruv pleaded that he was King Uttanpad's son just as much as Uttam was. But Queen Suruchi grew very angry and bade him go and pray to the gods. For, until they pitied him and let him be born again as her son, King Uttanpad would never take him on his knee again.

Little Dhruv went to his mother, Suniti, and told her what had happened. Suniti told him to pray to the god Krishna. So little Dhruv said that he would go into the forest and pray to Krishna, and when he had done so he would return and tell her. But once he had entered the forest he prayed and



QUEEN SURUCHI AND DHRUV

prayed and prayed so that he never thought of returning, and lived on roots and water. And as he prayed years passed by until the god Krishna, pleased with the boy's devotion, revealed himself and offered him a boon. 'Take me with you, O lord, back to heaven,' said Dhruv. 'No,' said Krishna, 'that cannot be. You have yet to go to your father's country and reign over it and bring it happiness. In due time I shall send for you.' Dhruv consented. And the god Krishna sent the great sage Narada to lead him back to his father's town. Narada took the prince's hand in his and led him back to King Uttanpad's city.

For many years the king had mourned for Dhruv as one long dead. But when Narada sent word to him that Prince Dhruv had returned, the king made great preparations to welcome his son. Seated in a golden howdah carried by the king's own elephant, and shaded by the royal umbrella, Prince Dhruv was borne back to his father's palace. And, as he passed through the streets, all the maidens, peeping at him through the chinks in the walls or from the corners of the windows, wondered at the handsome prince. And all the matrons and aged dames showered flowers on him from their balconies and roofs. For all were overjoyed at his return, except only Prince Uttam and his mother, Queen Suruchi. For Prince Uttam had grown into a selfish, jealous man, and he was furious that his brother should receive such favour from the king and such honour from the people. And Queen Suruchi hated Prince Dhruv as a possible rival to her own son. Thus, although the king and Queen Suniti and the nobles and the ministers welcomed Prince Dhruv

and tried to outbid each other in the warmth of their greeting, his brother would barely look in his direction, and Queen Suruchi muttered to herself, but so loudly that the bystanders heard, 'If only the brat had died in the forest!'

Prince Dhruv did his utmost to win their love, but all to no purpose. Prince Uttam and Queen Suruchi sought every day to humiliate him. At last the king rebuked Prince Uttam. Then the young man's anger knew no bounds. He begged the king for leave to go out with an army that was about to attack a forest tribe who for some months past had revolted against the king's authority. The king gave his son leave to go, and placed him at the head of the horse-soldiers, but under the orders of the general. Prince Uttam, however, was vain and wayward. He would not heed the advice of his father's general, but taking his horsemen with him he marched ahead of the foot-soldiers into the forest. There the forest tribes easily lured the prince into an ambush, and slew him and all the men with him. When the sad news reached the capital, King Uttanpad sent Prince Dhruv out with a band of fresh horsemen. He and the king's general fully avenged Prince Uttam's death, and with great pomp and laden with spoil and captives Prince Dhruv and the army returned in triumph.

But the loss of her son and the triumph of Prince Dhruv unsettled Queen Suruchi's mind. One day she ran out of the city and into the woods, and was never heard of afterwards. Then King Uttanpad felt that the time had come for him, as an Aryan king, to resign his crown to his son. So he gave up his robes and sceptre to Prince Dhruv, and

in the garb of a pilgrim wandered forth into the forest, and there led the life of an ascetic until death freed him.

Then King Dhruv ruled in his father's place. And for many a score of years he ruled, beloved by his subjects. And his armies were always victorious and the frontiers of his kingdom daily widened, and no monarch in all India was so greatly feared or honoured as he. Yet his heart was always sad, for he often thought, with sighs, of the happy years in which as a boy he had worshipped Krishna in the Madhu forest. And often he said to himself, 'Fool that I was to return to my father's home. How happy I should have been had I but spent my life in the woods, worshipping the god Krishna. In the end he would surely have borne me away and gathered me to his bosom.'

One day he could bear it no longer, and, handing over the reins of sovereignty to his son, he made his way back to the Madhu forest on the banks of the Yamuna. He came at last to his old hermitage, and suddenly in front of him he saw what he had never seen when he lived there before—a rugged path which rose steeply towards the north. Dhruv paused a moment, but a voice within him seemed to bid him follow the path. He did so, but it seemed never to end. It grew steeper and steeper. And King Dhruv would have fainted by the way had he not seemed to hear divine voices urging him onwards. Flowers, too, came floating on the breeze, as if showered down by hands far above him. So he struggled on until at last he came to the abodes of the Sun and the Moon.

'Stay with us, King Dhruv,' cried the Sun-god

and the Moon-god. 'There is no place beyond us. So stay with us and be welcome.'

'Nay,' said King Dhruv, 'I must go on until I reach the end of the path that stretches in front of me.'

And indeed the path ran right through the abodes of the Moon-god and the Sun-god, and lost itself in the distance beyond. So, weary with labour and years, Dhruv climbed upwards until he came to where the seven rishis lived.

'Stay with us, bold prince,' cried the seven rishis. 'We need a mortal to whom to teach our lore.' King Dhruv bowed to the seven rishis. 'Incomparable sages,' he replied, 'if I could stay with you I gladly would, so that I could learn your priceless wisdom. But I desire to worship the god Krishna, and until I find the place to which he directs me I must follow this path.' So the king went on towards the north along the path which never seemed to end. And the seven sages watched him as he went. At last they saw him reach the end of the path. For it stopped suddenly and a bottomless chasm yawned in front of Dhruv. There they saw him sit down and cast his eyes up in silent adoration of the god whom he had loved and sought.

And, as the sages watched Dhruv, they saw him gradually lose his human shape and become a shining form. For, as he prayed, there entered into him the spirit of the mighty god. And, as they watched him, they too turned into shining forms and they too remained motionless in silent contemplation of the saintly king.

And on any cloudless night, if you look up at

the sky, you will see a constellation flung like a saucepan right across it. And if you look at the far side of the saucepan and follow the direction in which the stars which form it are pointing, you will see all by itself a beautiful, clear star that points ever to the far north, beyond which the god Krishna has his throne. For the saucepan-like constellation is that which Indians call the Seven Sages. But in the west it is known as the Great Bear. And the lonely star to which the seven rishis ever silently point is Dhruv.

For Dhruv is the Pole Star.

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

ONCE upon a time, in the youth of the world, there stood to the north of India a mighty mountain named Mount Meru. Its summit shone so brightly that the sun's rays, when they struck it, shivered and fell away. One day the lesser gods gathered in council upon its peak, for they wished to obtain the ambrosia which would make them immortal like the three supreme gods Vishnu, Brahmadeva and Shiva. Now the jar in which the ambrosia was kept lay at the bottom of the ocean, and none of the lesser gods could conceive a plan by which they could obtain possession of it. As they sat in council, there came to them the great god Vishnu, and the lesser gods asked him for his advice. Vishnu answered them, saying, 'Call the demons to your aid and churn the ocean. When you have churned it, not only will you get the ambrosia, but you will get a great store of jewels and other precious things besides.'

The lesser gods followed the counsel of Vishnu, left the summit of Mount Meru and withdrew to another great mountain named Mount Mandara. Its peak was not resplendent like that of Mount Meru. Its sides were covered with dense forests, through which roamed elephants and lions, tigers and leopards. The lesser gods seized the great mountain and tried to uproot it, so that they might churn the ocean with it, as the Lord Vishnu had advised. But although they strove their utmost, the great mass of Mount Mandara moved not a

hair's breadth. The celestials, finding their strength unequal to the task, sought out the great gods Vishnu and Brahmadeva. 'Great lords,' they said, 'tell us, we pray you, how we may uproot Mandara Mountain, for without it we cannot churn the ocean and win the ambrosia.' Lord Vishnu called to him Vasuki, the king of the snake people, and said to him, 'O Snake King, the command that I lay upon you is this. Go with the lesser gods and help them to uproot Mandara Mountain.' Vasuki, the king of the snake people, obeyed Lord Vishnu, and, going with the lesser gods to Mount Mandara, he fastened round it his endless coils. Then, pressing them against the base of the mountain, he tore it up by the roots. Together the Snake King and the lesser gods rolled the mountain to the shores of the ocean. 'Lord Ocean,' they said, 'we desire the ambrosia which lies fathoms deep below your surface. And to win it we shall churn your water with the Mandara Mountain.' 'As you will,' said the ocean. 'Give me but a draught of the ambrosia, and I will gladly allow you to churn my waters.'

Hearing the words of the ocean the lesser gods were glad, and, as the Lord Vishnu had advised them, they bade the demons join them. Then gods and demons went together to the king of the tortoises. They found him in his palace, and said to him, 'O Tortoise King, come to our aid, we pray you. For we have resolved to churn the ocean with Mount Mandara, that we may win the ambrosia. But if we place Mount Mandara at the bottom of the ocean it will sink into the sands. Come, therefore, O King of the Tortoises, and lie at the bottom of the ocean. For, if you bear it on your mighty

back, we shall be able to pull Mount Mandara to and fro and so churn the ocean.' The Tortoise King consented, and with the gods and the demons walked to the shores of the ocean. When they had reached the edge of the water, the god Indra, the chief of the lesser gods, by means of many cunning instruments, placed Mount Mandara upon the back of the King of the Tortoises. Bearing his mighty burden, the King of the Tortoises entered the ocean, and walked along its bottom until he reached the deepest part. Then Vasuki, the Snake King, swam out across the surface of the water until he reached the spot where the top of Mount Mandara stood high above the waves. Coiling himself round the great mountain, he bade the lesser gods hold him by the tail and the demons hold his head. Demons and gods seized him as he bade them, and, pulling him backwards and forwards, they began to churn the ocean. Great masses of foam rose upon the waters. Clouds of vapour issued from the mouth of the Snake King Vasuki, and scorched the faces of the demons who pulled the Snake King's head. Then, rising higher, the vapour descended in cooling rain to refresh the lesser gods. And the forest flowers torn from the sides of Mount Mandara by the coils of the Snake King were wafted abroad by the winds, and fell softly upon their faces. The gods and demons pulled the mountain summit backwards and forwards through the air so swiftly that the forests upon it caught fire. But the god Indra opened the windows of heaven, and the rain fell in torrents on the fire and extinguished it. Yet, although gods and demons toiled without ceasing until their strength was spent, nothing rose from

the surface of the ocean. The lesser gods and the demons then went to the court of Brahmadeva and said, 'O father of the gods, we are exhausted with labour and can work no more, yet the ambrosia has not been won. Brahmadeva begged the Lord Vishnu to give the gods and demons greater strength, that they might continue the churning. This the Lord Vishnu did, and they swung Mount Mandara to and fro until the foam of the churned ocean rose almost higher than the great mountain itself. At last a pale yellow disc began slowly to rise from the ocean. It rose right out of the waters high into the sky, and, ever since, as the moon, has at night time shed its pale light over the earth. Next there rose from the waters an elephant larger than mortal mind could have imagined. His enormous white tusks stretched many yards in front of him. His eyes were like red ponds, and his trunk seemed to rival in length the great coils of the Snake King himself. Indra called the mighty beast to him, and, soothing it with his hand, said, 'You shall be known hereafter as Airavat and shall be my servant always.' Still the churning continued, and there rose from the sea the prettiest maid who had ever been seen in the three worlds. Her long black lashes drooped upon a pair of rosy cheeks. Her hair curled in golden rings over an ivory forehead. Her eyes were bluer than the sky above. Indra called her to him. 'You shall hereafter be called Rambha,' he said, 'and you shall be chief among my dancing-girls.'

Harder still the gods and demons toiled at the churning, until there rose from the waters the most awful vision of beauty that eyes human or divine

had ever seen. From a perfect face two eyes of deepest grey looked out. They gazed unblinking into space. But so grave was their expression and so full of wisdom that neither demon nor god, except Vishnu alone, dared meet their look. A moment later, amid an awed hush, Vishnu stepped forward and took the lovely woman by the hand. 'You shall be called Lakshmi,' he said, 'and you shall be my queen.'

Backwards and forwards swung Mount Mandara. Then from a distance the gods and demons saw a fair woman coming towards them. In each hand she carried a jar, but, when she came nearer, they saw that her expression was evil and that great lines marred her features and black pits lay under her eyes. They let the strange woman pass, and she made her way to the dry earth. There, known as Sura or the wine goddess, she has dwelt ever since.

Again they churned until there rose above the waves a pure white horse. It was the most beautifully shaped horse that has ever lived on earth. It swam through the billows until it reached the shore, when it thundered out of sight at full gallop.

'Let its name be Uchaisrava,' said Indra, and the gods and the demons once more bent to the churning. Then there rose above the foam the most marvellous jewel that eyes have ever beheld. Set in a vast plate of gold were emeralds like the green pools of an Indian village, and sapphires like the blue lakes in the Himalaya mountains. Vast rubies shone out of masses of diamonds huge as rocks of crystal. The Lord Vishnu stepped forward and fastened the sea-jewel round his neck. There, known as Kaustubha, it has hung ever since.

Still they churned, the gods and demons, until a strange ripple spread over the waters and a terrible stench rose from it. The head and tail of the giant snake dropped gradually out of the hands of the fainting churners. Even Vasuki's eyes became dull and his coils began to slip inertly off Mount Mandara's sides. Suddenly the god Shiva placed his mouth on the waves near the ripple, and sucking it in, saved the three worlds. For this was the terrible Vish—the poisonous fluid which overlaid the ambrosia to guard it. If the Lord Shiva had not drunk it, it would have destroyed alike the lesser gods, demons and men. As the Lord Shiva swallowed it, it burnt a deep blue mark on his throat. And he has ever since been known as Nilkantha or Blue-throat.

When the fumes of the Vish had passed away, the gods and demons churned once more. At last an aged man rose slowly through the masses of the ocean foam. In his right hand he carried a gold jar of exquisite workmanship, from which issued a perfume of delicious fragrance. At the sight of the aged man, whom they knew to be Dhanwantari, the demons snatched the ambrosia from his hands, trying to rob the gods of their share. But the Lord Vishnu took it back from them. And to punish them for their greed he poured out the ambrosia to the gods only, who drank it and at once became immortal, while the demons, who drank none of it, have remained mortal to this day.

But one of the demons, Rahu by name, took the form of a celestial, and, deceiving the Lord Vishnu, received a draught of ambrosia. As the demon drank, the Sun-god pierced his disguise and told

the Lord Vishnu of his deceit. Vishnu, lifting his discus, shore off the head of Rahu with it before the ambrosia had passed his throat. Rahu's body fell to the ground, and, being mortal, soon rotted. But his head, having taken the ambrosia, is immortal and still endures.

But because the Sun-god detected him as he drank the divine liquid, and told Vishnu, Rahu's head bears to the Sun-god an undying hatred. Sometimes he steals up unperceived close to the bright Sun-god, and with a single bite swallows him. But because Rahu has no body, the Sun-god in due course reappears through his enemy's throat, and once again begins to shine upon the earth in all his former splendour.

And then men gather together and say that there has been an eclipse of the sun.

KING JIMUTKETU AND PRINCE JIMUTVAHAN

ONCE upon a time there stood upon the Himalayas a town of the Gandharvas. Over it ruled a king, Jimutketu by name. In order to obtain a son he worshipped the Wishing Tree piously. At last the Wishing Tree said to him, 'O king, I am pleased with your devotion. Ask anything of me that you wish.' 'Divine Tree,' answered the king, 'vouchsafe me a son who will make my kingdom and my renown endure after me.' A year later one of his queens bore the king a son. The king was delighted and gave large sums to charity. Then he sent for Brahmins to name his son. The Brahmins gave his son the name of Jimutvahan. When the boy was eight years old, he began daily to worship the gods and to study the sacred books. In this way he became so wise and thoughtful, adventurous and brave, pious and learned, that he had no equal in the whole kingdom. And all his subjects became as virtuous as he was. When he reached manhood, he worshipped the Wishing Tree continuously,¹ just as his father had done. And the Wishing Tree, as pleased with him as it had been with his father, appeared before him and told him to ask for a boon.

'Divine Tree,' said Jimutvahan, 'if you are

¹ The Kalpa Vraksha, or Wishing Tree, has the quality of granting any wish to him who sees it. It came up at the churning of the ocean. The god Indra first took it, but the greater god, Vishnu, eventually took it from him.

pleased with me, then remove, I pray you, all poverty from my people, and make them all equally rich.' 'So be it,' said the Wishing Tree. Then all King Jimutketu's subjects became so rich that none of them would obey any orders or do any work. When the whole kingdom had become disorganized the king's relatives conspired together, saying: 'Father and son have both become religious mad. No one obeys them. Let us, therefore, imprison both of them and take their throne from them.' The king did not even suspect the plot until his kinsmen with an armed force one day besieged the palace. The king asked his son what he should do. 'Fear nothing,' answered the prince; 'through your valour and merit I shall beat them in battle.' 'My son,' said the king, 'this body is destructible and fortune is fickle. A man's end is born with him. Therefore, let us abandon our kingdom and spend the rest of our lives in prayer. If we fight for our lives and thrones, we shall in the end repent of it.' When the son heard the king's words, he said, 'As you please, my father. Let us yield our kingdom up to our kinsmen and depart to do penances in the forest.' Thereafter the king summoned his kinsmen and handed over the kingdom to them. Next he and his son went to the Malaya Mountains, and, building a hut of leaves, dwelt in it. There Jimutvahan gained the friendship of a rishi's son. One day the prince and the rishi's son went for a walk among the hills. As they walked, they saw a maiden playing on a lute and dancing before an image of Parvati. When the prince's and the maiden's eyes met, they instantly fell in love. The maiden, blushing, ran back home.

Jimutvahan went home too: he was too shy to tell his father what had befallen him. But both he and the maiden were unable to sleep, and sighed the whole night through. Next morning the maiden went to Parvati's temple. Jimutvahan, too, went there alone. He asked one of the serving-maids who her mistress was. She answered, 'The princess's name is Malayavati. She is the daughter of Malayaketu, a king of Vidyadharas. But you, sir, who are you, and whence have you come, and what is your name?' The prince told the serving-maid his whole life-story from his birth onward, and the serving-maid repeated it all to the princess. The princess felt very sad and spent her days lying on her couch, deep in thought. Her serving maid told the queen. The queen told the king, and added that the princess was now a woman, and that it was time to choose her a husband.

After the queen had spoken, King Malayaketu thought the subject over. Then he sent for his son, Mitravasu, and told him to look out for a husband for his sister. 'My father,' said Mitravasu, 'I hear that Jimutketu, a king of the Gandharvas, and his son Jimutvahan, have abandoned their kingdom, and have come to live upon these mountains.' King Malayaketu said 'Very well: I am quite willing to marry my daughter to Jimutvahan. Go and see King Jimutketu and bring Jimutvahan back with you.' Mitravasu went to Jimutketu's hermitage and asked him to let his son go back with him. 'My father has sent for him,' the prince explained, 'as he wishes to bestow on him the princess, my sister.' King Jimutketu agreed, and sent Jimutvahan back with the messenger. Thereafter King Malayaketu

married Princess Malayavati to Prince Jimutvahan with great pomp and circumstance.

After the wedding, Jimutvahan with Malayavati and Mitravasu returned to his hermitage. All three fell at the old king's feet. And in return he blessed them. Next day both the young princes went for a walk over the hills. As they walked, they came to a big white heap. When Jimutvahan saw it, he said, 'Brother, what is that big white heap?' Mitravasu replied, 'The snake people come up here in hundreds of thousands, and every day Garud¹ comes down from the sky and eats them up. The heap is made of their bones.' Jimutvahan was silent for a moment; then he said, 'Brother, go home and have your breakfast. I shall remain here and worship the god Shiva. I always worship him at this time.' Mitravasu went back to breakfast and Jimutvahan walked on. After he had walked for some way, he heard the noise of someone weeping. Jimutvahan went in the direction of the sound. At last he came to an old woman weeping. He went up to her and asked her why she cried. 'I have a son,' she answered, 'named Shankhchud. Today it is his turn to serve as food for Garud. Garud will surely eat him. That is why I am weeping.' 'Do not weep, lady,' said Jimutvahan, 'I am ready to give my life to save your son.' 'No, no,' cried the old woman, 'do not throw away your life like that. Indeed, I feel as fond of you as if you were my own son Shankhchud.'

As she was speaking Shankhchud came up. When he learnt what the prince had said, he

¹ Garud is Vishnu's eagle. Vishnu rides him (see *Tales from the Indian Epics*).

exclaimed, 'Fair prince! do not sacrifice your life for mine. There are many miserable wretches on earth like me; whereas men as virtuous and kindly as you are rarely met with. If you live, you will benefit thousands, whereas it makes no difference to anyone whether I live or die.' 'Nay,' answered Jimutvahan, 'an honourable man cannot go back on an offer once made. You go back the way you came. I shall sit here where you would have sat, and Garud will come and eat me.'

Shankhchud went to Parvati's temple to worship her image. Just after he had gone, Garud swooped down from the sky. When the prince saw his terrible form, horror seized him. Garud's legs were four times longer than the tallest bamboo. His beak was as long as a toddy palm. His great stomach was the size of a mountain. His eyes were like the windows of a house. His wings were like great black thunder-clouds. With open beak he rushed at the prince, and seizing him flew up into the heavens in huge circles. The prince had a golden ring on his finger, on which his name was engraved. All blood-smeared it slipped off his finger and fell down upon the Malaya hills, close to where his wife happened to be sitting. Directly she saw it she fainted. When she recovered consciousness, she went home and told her father and mother. They looked at the ring, and, recognizing it as the prince's, were heart-broken. Her brother, sister and father went out to look for Jimutvahan. On the way Shankhchud met them. He told them the whole story, and showed them Garud circling in the sky above them. Then he ran until he was directly under the mighty bird, and shouted out,



... AND SEIZING HIM, FLEW UP INTO THE HEAVENS.'

O Garud, let him go. He is not your prey. My name is Shankhchud. Here I am sitting on this stone. Come and eat me.' When Garud heard, he was puzzled, and descended to earth. 'Woe is me!' he thought to himself, 'I must have seized some Brahmin or Kshatriya. I have sinned greatly.' He freed the prince and said, 'Tell me, O man, who you are, and why you throw your life away like this?'

'Listen,' answered the prince; 'a tree suffers from the summer heat and yet throws a cool shade. It bears fruits and others eat them. The nature of the tree resembles that of the true man. What avails a man to have a body if he cannot use it for the benefit of others? If sandalwood is ground to powder it gives a sweeter perfume. Sugarcane gives its juice only when it is cut into pieces and pressed in the mill. To refine gold men heat it in the fire. Heroes remain true even though it costs them their lives. Pleasure and pain matter nothing. It is all one to them whether they die today or a hundred years hence. If fortune is on man's side, he is happy; if fortune deserts him, he is miserable. He who walks in the path of righteousness will face any evil, but he will not plant his foot in the path of wickedness. A man becomes no better by growing rich, nor does he become any worse if he grows poor. In short, he who in this life does not win the gratitude of another lives in vain. But he who gives his life for another has put it to good service. Men who think only of saving their own lives are no better than crows or dogs. But the man who dies to save a cow or a Brahmin, his friend or his wife or, indeed, any

other, goes to Vaikunth, Vishnu's heaven.' Garud answered, 'All honour to the man brave enough to give his life for another, for he is rarely met with in this world.' Then he said, 'I am pleased with your gallant act; ask of me any boon you will.' Prince Jimutvahan said, 'Divine Bird, grant me, I pray you, this boon: eat no more snake people from today onwards, and bring back to life those of the snake people that you have eaten in the past.'

Garud, on hearing the words of the prince, descended into Patala, and bringing back ambrosia sprinkled it over the heap of bones. Instantly all the snake people that he had eaten came to life again. Then Garud blessed Jimutvahan, saying, 'Prince, you will win back your kingdom.' After making this promise, Garud went to his own abode and Shankhchud went back to his dwelling-place underground. Jimutvahan rejoined his father-in-law, his brother-in-law and his wife, and all went back, rejoicing, to Jimutvahan's hermitage. But the fame of Prince Jimutvahan's noble act spread to his father's kingdom. And his kinsmen and all his people, on hearing of it, set out to the Malaya Mountains and called him back to sit upon his father's throne.

SAKUNTALA

LIST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Vishvamitra</i>	...	A sage who tried to make himself master of Indra's heaven.
<i>Menaka</i>	...	A nymph who tempted Vishvamitra.
<i>Sakuntala</i>	...	The daughter of Vishvamitra.
<i>Kanva</i>	...	The sage who brought up Sakuntala.
<i>Durvasa</i>	...	The sage who cursed Sakuntala.
<i>Gautami</i>	...	The matron who went with Sakuntala to Hastinapura.
<i>Dushyanta</i>	...	The King of Hastinapura.
<i>Bharat</i>	...	The son of Dushyanta and Sakuntala.

ONCE upon a time there lived in India a mighty sage called Vishvamitra, who strove, by his austerities and penances, to win from the god Indra the celestial throne. To foil him, Indra sent to earth Menaka, the fairest of his dancing-girls. Menaka tempted Vishvamitra and he fell: he lost heaven for the sake of her beauty. A little girl was born from their union, but Vishvamitra was angry because he had yielded to temptation, and would not have her near him. Menaka, her task done, returned to Amravati, Indra's heaven. So the poor little baby girl was left alone in the forest. She would have died of neglect if the forest-birds had not pitied and fed her. At last the hermit Kanva passed that way and saw her; he picked her up and took her to his hermitage on the bank of the Malini river. There she grew tall and straight like the trees of the forest, with the most perfect form and the fairest face in the world.

One day, while Dushyanta, King of Hastinapura, was hunting a stag in the forest, he came past Kanva's hermitage. The stag rushed for shelter to

the sage's dwelling and the hermit's disciples forbade the king to slay it. Dushyanta obeyed and alighted from his chariot. He entered the hermitage. As he rested in its cool shade, he saw several maidens come towards him bearing jars of water for the garden of the hermitage. Among them was Sakuntala. Suddenly a bee began to buzz near her and frightened her. Her companions were themselves too timid to chase it away; at last, distracted by her fears, she ran towards the hermitage where King Dushyanta sat. The king rose and stepped forward. The maidens, not knowing his rank, greeted him kindly and bade him stay. But the king had no eyes for anyone except Sakuntala; and she was no less struck by the mighty frame and handsome face of the young king.

At last Dushyanta took a ring from his finger and slipped it on Sakuntala's. All the maidens crowded round her to read the name written on it. When they read the word 'Dushyanta' they stood aside, in fear of the lord of all the land, and prayed their royal visitor to stay as long as he wished in the hermit's forest. Nothing would have pleased Dushyanta better. But he was King of Hastinapura and his duties called him there. As he thought sadly of returning, the hermits gathered round him and implored him to stay. The sage Kanva was away, and, in his absence, the forest demons came and hindered the hermits' sacrifices. Here was a fit excuse. To kill demons and protect hermits was a task worthy of a king. Dushyanta stayed, fought the demons, and slew them. But by the time he had finished his task, he himself had fallen head over ears in love with Sakuntala. Now he no longer

thought of returning to Hastinapura. He stayed on in the forest as if to guard the Brahmins, but in real truth to woo Sakuntala. Nor was the maiden less in love with Dushyanta. He was the king of the land, in the fullness of youth and beauty. The hermits, too, sang his praises all day long, for had he not single-handed slain or driven away the demons who tried to steal their offerings and prevent their winning the favour of the gods? Sakuntala could not, if she would, withstand Dushyanta's pleading, and with the consent of Kanva she became his bride.

A few months of unclouded happiness passed, but the King of Hastinapura could not stay for ever. The cares of state awaited him, and his subjects and ministers grew impatient at his absence. With great grief King Dushyanta resolved to leave Sakuntala, promising that he would return to the arms of his beloved lady as soon as he could spare a day from his royal labours. Sakuntala bade him good-bye at the outskirts of Kanva's wood. As she returned, her mind full of care and her thoughts far away with Dushyanta on the road to Hastinapura, she forgot to gather blossoms from the wayside. These she should have picked as an offering for the sage Durvasa, who had come as a visitor to the hermitage. The anchorite, furious at the neglect, called down on her a terrible curse, 'Just as you have forgotten me,' he cried, beside himself with anger, 'so shall the one you love best forget you.' The frightened Sakuntala ran to her companions and begged them to intercede for her. One of them, Priyamvada, whose sweet voice had made her a favourite with the terrible old man, threw herself

at his feet and begged him to pardon Sakuntala. Durvasa relented, but not wholly. 'Once my word is spoken,' he said, 'it cannot be set aside. But I forgive her so far as this: if she show his keepsake to him whom she loves best, my curse will vanish.'

Priyamvada ran back to Sakuntala to soothe her fears and tell her how she might escape the sage's curse. When Sakuntala heard what Durvasa had said, she felt happy again. 'I am safe then,' she cried. 'I have my husband's ring on my finger and nothing could make me part with it.'

Some weeks passed, but Dushyanta did not return. So vast was the work that had arisen in his absence, and so urgent the questions that faced him on his return, that he could not leave Hastinapura even for a day.

As Sakuntala waited sadly for her lord's coming, there came to her hopes of a child. She told her hopes to Kanva, who bade her leave him and go to Hastinapura. It was but right, he said, that her lord should know that a child would be born to him. With her he sent a holy matron, called Gautami, and several other maidens of the hermitage. They went on foot, and, as the journey was long, they stopped close to a waterfall of the Ganges. By it was a shrine to Indra's queen, Sachi, and here they worshipped. As Sakuntala bathed, Dushyanta's ring slipped off her finger, without her seeing, and fell into a pool in the Ganges. Unconscious of the loss the party rested, and in the evening reached Hastinapura.

At the palace gates, Gautami sent word that messengers from the sage Kanva wished to see the

king. So great was the fame of Kanva that his name won them instant admission. Sakuntala, full of love for Dushyanta, was led with her companions into the king's presence. Dushyanta looked at them coldly and asked why they had come. Sakuntala, who had thought that her royal husband would at once clasp her in his arms, was horror-struck at his cold looks. 'This lady,' said Gautami, 'is the maiden whom, a few months back, you met in Kanva's forest and married. She now hopes to bear you a child.' 'I have never even seen this lady,' replied the king scornfully. Gautami turned to Sakuntala and said, 'Take off your veil: when he sees your face, he will himself recall it.' Sakuntala did so, but the king's face showed no recognition. 'She is about to bear a child, as you say. That even I can see. But, as I have never seen her before, how can I be its father?' Sakuntala gazed at him, as if turned to stone. Suddenly she remembered Durvasa's curse and her face brightened. 'It is because I have not shown him my ring,' she murmured, and put up her hand to show it to him. But the ring was not there. 'I have lost the king's ring,' she said to Gautami. 'It must have slipped off in the river as I worshipped at Sachi's shrine.'

Sakuntala would not give up hope without one last effort. 'My lord will perhaps remember this,' she said to Dushyanta. 'One day you and I, King Dushyanta, were together in a bower of jasmine: you were about to drink, when my pet fawn came up. You offered it water and it was too frightened to drink. But, when I gave it water in my hand, it drank. Then you laughed and said, "Like trusts like."'

‘In truth, a pretty tale!’ laughed the king. ‘How truly have men said that women win their goal by their sweet, false words!’

Sakuntala, crimson with shame and grief, would have fled from the palace, but the priests stopped her: for, to test her story, the king wished to see whether, on his birth, her son had the marks that denoted an heir of kings. But her mother, Menaka, pitying her state, came down in the guise of a flash of lightning, and bearing her away, put her back in Kanva’s hermitage.

Some years went by, but no thought of Sakuntala even entered Dushyanta’s head. One day his police brought to the palace a fisherman who earned a living by fishing in the Ganges river. They had caught him trying to sell a gold ring with ‘Dushyanta’ engraved on it. The poor fisherman was taken before the king, and told his story in faltering words. ‘Two days ago,’ he said, ‘I caught a fish in the Ganges, great king. I cut it open and inside I found the ring. I cannot read; so I could not tell what was engraved on it. I came to Hastinapura to sell it.’ The king took the ring and in a flash his memory came back to him. He saw his wife Sakuntala and the forest hermitage and the jasmine bower; and his cheeks grew scarlet, as he thought how he had sent her away. ‘Set him free!’ he cried to the guards. ‘This fisherman, far from being guilty, has done me a great service.’

Dushyanta gave the fisherman the value of the ring in money and sent him away. Then he resolved to go at once to the hermitage of Kanva and seek Sakuntala. But suddenly he remembered that she had been carried away from the palace,

as if by a flash of lightning. 'She was Menaka's daughter,' he murmured sadly to himself. 'Menaka has taken Sakuntala with her back to Indra's heaven.' Filled with the mistaken fancy, he stayed at Hastinapura and wore himself out with the labours of kingship; but sleep left him, and night and day he thought only of Sakuntala. He mourned, too, for the loss of the child that she had promised to bear him; for his other queens were childless, and, at his own death, the great house of Hastinapura would die out.

One day Matali, Indra's messenger, came to Hastinapura and told Dushyanta that a race of giants, the offspring of the demon Kalanemi, had come to dwell in the forest of Hastinapura, and were killing the Brahmins and hindering their sacrifices to the gods. Dushyanta, delighted to get a change of scene, called for his chariot, his armour, and his bow and arrows, and drove into the forest with Matali.

Now Indra, at Menaka's prayer, had bidden Matali reunite Dushyanta with Sakuntala. After Dushyanta had fought and slain the race of giants in the forest, Matali took him in his chariot to Indra's court. There the great god greeted the hero and dismissed him. Matali returned with Dushyanta to earth, but made his chariot descend in the very wood where the sage Kanva had his hermitage. The king alighted, and as he walked along, he saw a little boy six years of age, who was playing with a lion cub and forcing its mouth open. Two maidens of the hermitage tried to stop him, but the boy took no heed, and, with the strength of a man rather than of a child, held down the cub and tore

its jaws apart. As Dushyanta looked at the boy, a great wave of love for him surged through his heart; he felt certain that the little lad must be his own son. And so he was—he was Prince Bharata, whom Sakuntala had borne to her faithless lord in Kanva's hermitage.

'Come here,' said Dushyanta to the little boy, 'I am your father.'

'You are not my father,' said the little prince scornfully. 'My father is King Dushyanta of Hastinapura. I do not know who you are.'

Just then Sakuntala came towards the group. Sorrow had lined her face and streaked her hair, tears had worn her cheeks; but she was still as beautiful as ever. The little prince, seeing her, cried, 'Mother, mother, there is a strange man who says he is my father. He isn't, is he?'

Sakuntala looked up and saw in front of her the splendid person of King Dushyanta. While she paused, wondering whether he knew her again or not, Dushyanta fell at her feet and said, 'Forgive me, my beloved, for my former neglect. Now I know you to be my bride, my Queen Sakuntala.' 'Rise, my king,' said Sakuntala, laughing and sobbing at the same time. 'But I see you have my ring on your finger! Where did you get it?' Dushyanta told her the story and begged her to take it back. 'No,' said Sakuntala, 'I do not trust it. It slipped off my finger once; it may do so again. Then you may perhaps forget me, as you did before. Keep it with you, my king, and you will always have my image in your heart.'

Dushyanta did as Sakuntala bade him, and never again forgot his love for his beautiful forest-bride.

He took her and the little prince back with him to Hastinapura, and there Bharata grew to be a hero even mightier than his father, a very king among men. When Dushyanta died, Bharata succeeded him on the throne of Hastinapura and became the greatest king that India had ever seen for he conquered all India and gave it the name of Bharata Varsha, or Land of the Bharatas, which it bears to this day. And his descendants were the great Bharata princes, whose wars and adventures were told by the sage Vaisampayan in the greatest book in all the world—the *Mahabharata*, or The Book of the Great Deeds of The Bharatas.¹

¹For the story of the Bharata princes see *The Indian Heroes* (Oxford University Press).

KING DASHARATHA OF AYODHYA

MANY hundred years ago there ruled in Ayodhya a famous king, called King Dasharatha, of the noble line of Ikshwaku, of which men said the Sun-god himself was the founder. King Dasharatha had three wives, Queens Kausalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi. And he had four sons, Rama by Queen Kausalya, Bharata by Queen Kaikeyi, and Laxman and Shatrughna¹ by Queen Sumitra. The four young princes were beautiful to look upon, and indeed men whispered that the great god Vishnu had divided his divine spirit between them. But of that I know nothing. Only if you had seen them you would have said that they looked like the sons of the immortals. And Prince Rama was the most beautiful of all the four; indeed, King Dasharatha's subjects loved to call him Ramachandra, or Rama Like the Moon, for his face was as fair and bright as a summer moon when it floats in the cloudless skies of India.

Now, when King Dasharatha ruled over Ayodhya, the Aryans had conquered only a part of northern India. All the country south of the Ganges was infested by Rakshasas, or ogres, and by monsters and cannibals and savages of every kind. And it behoved every young prince to prove his worth by ridding the lands south of the Ganges of the wild beasts and wilder men that dwelt in them. When

¹The Marathi poet, Shridhar, in his *Ramavijaya*, Adhyaya 4, makes Shatrughna the son of Queen Kaikeyi, but in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, and in the *Raghuvansa*, Shatrughna appears as the son of Queen Sumitra, and I have followed the Sanskrit. Tulsidas has also done so.

Prince Rama was only sixteen, a very wise and holy man, called Vishvamitra, sought the place and asked for a boon. King Dasharatha inquired what the boon was. Vishvamitra in reply prayed that Prince Rama should be sent back with him, that the prince might rid the forest in which the sage lived of two demons in human form, called Maricha and Suvahu. They tore to pieces, and devoured said the sage, every man whom they met, and through fear of them Vishvamitra had fled from his hermitage to Ayodhya. King Dasharatha looked sadly at his eldest son, but he knew that the time had come when Rama, as an Aryan prince, must prove his worth. So the king reluctantly consented. Prince Rama left Ayodhya with Vishvamitra. And with Rama, as his page, there went his favourite brother, Prince Laxman.

Ayodhya lay but a day's journey from the Ganges. The princes and Vishvamitra reached it on the evening of the day on which they left Ayodhya. They halted for the night by the banks of the mighty river, and Vishvamitra lulled the lads to sleep with tales of the saints of old time and of the gods who in years gone by had visited the holy places of India. Next morning they started once more for Vishvamitra's hermitage. But the path thither led through a forest called the Taraka Forest. It was so named because there lived in it Taraka, the mother of the two demons, Maricha and Suvahu, whom Prince Rama had set out to slay. Now Taraka had guessed that Vishvamitra had fled to Ayodhya in order to seek aid against her two sons. So she lay in wait in the forest to slay Vishvamitra as he returned with his helpers. As

Prince Rama entered the forest, he twanged his bowstring to see if his bow was ready for use. And no sooner had he done so than Taraka rushed out of a neighbouring thicket. Rama drew his bowstring to his ear, and would have shot her with an arrow. But she, seeing the prince ready, at once made herself invisible. Then, rushing at Rama with a mighty cry, she would have torn him to pieces with her teeth and claws. But the great masters who had taught Prince Rama archery, had taught him to shoot by sound as well as by sight, and as the monster rushed at him Rama shot at the spot whence the cry came. So sure was his aim that the arrow pierced Taraka's heart and she fell to earth lifeless.

That night was spent by the princes and Vishvamitra in the Taraka Forest. And the sage lulled the boys to sleep with tales of the mighty kings of the Ikshwaku line, from whom they had sprung. And next morning he led them to the hermitage from which he had fled in fear of Taraka's two sons, Maricha and Suvahu. For six days the princes roamed through the woods, seeking in vain for Vishvamitra's enemies. And on the seventh day, Vishvamitra, thinking that they had fled, offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the immortal gods. But as he began the celebration, Maricha and Suvahu, who had never left the woods but had merely hidden themselves as the princes passed, rushed at them like hawks from the sky, hoping to catch them unawares. But, swiftly though they came, Prince Rama fixed an arrow to his bow more swiftly still. With that arrow he wounded Maricha so sorely that he fell into a neighbouring river, and

with difficulty escaped to the farther bank. With his second arrow Prince Rama shot Suvahu through the heart. And thus he rid Vishvamitra's forest of the two pests which had haunted it.

Their work finished, Rama and Laxman wished to return to Ayodhya and King Dasharatha. But Vishvamitra told Rama that the time had come for him still further to prove his kingly prowess. Not far from Vishvamitra's hermitage was the kingdom of Mithila. Over it there ruled King Janaka, who had declared that no one should marry his daughter, Sita, unless he could first bend the mighty bow which the god Shiva had bestowed on King Janaka's ancestor. The beauty of Sita had drawn to Mithila, from near and far, all the young Aryan princes of India. But none had bent the bow: and thus none had carried off to his father's palace the lovely Sita as his bride.

From his hermitage Vishvamitra led Rama and Laxman to Mithila. There King Janaka asked them their business. When he heard that Prince Rama had come as a suitor for the Princess Sita's hand, the king fixed the next day for the trial. All the nobles and people of Mithila assembled at the archery ground, and high above them all, by far the fairest, sat the beautiful Princess Sita. When she saw King Janaka's guards lead Prince Rama into the arena and give him the bow, she prayed to the immortal gods that he might bend it and win her for his bride; for such was the boy's beauty and noble bearing that she loved him immediately her eyes met his. And to herself she vowed that, so long as she lived, she never would marry anyone but Prince Rama of Ayodhya.

Then Rama took the bow in his left hand and strung it. With his right hand he drew the bow-string taut. But, although he pulled with his right hand until the veins stood out on his forehead and the muscles rose up on his back and shoulders, the stubborn bow gave not an inch. Princess Sita in despair closed her eyes and prayed to the immortals who rule the broad heavens to give unto Rama tenfold strength, so that he might bend it and take her for his queen. When she opened her eyes again, she saw the string move slowly outwards until the great back of the bow began to arch and the two points to draw near to each other. And the feathers on the winged arrow came closer and closer to Rama's cheek, and the iron head to the wood. And at last, when the bow was drawn to its utmost limit, there was a noise like a thunder-clap, and down in two pieces at the young hero's feet, fell the mighty weapon. King Janaka rose from his throne and proclaimed Prince Rama victorious. And Princess Sita, blushing like a gold mohur tree in blossom, placed a garland around Rama's neck.

King Janaka sent a herald to call King Dasharatha from Ayodhya to Mithila. King Dasharatha came, and with him brought his two other sons, the Princes Bharata and Shatrughna. To Prince Rama, King Janaka gave the Princess Sita. To Prince Laxman, he gave Sita's sister, the Princess Urmila. To the Princes Bharata and Shatrughna, King Janaka gave his two nieces, the Princesses Mandavya and Shrutakirti. With fitting ceremonial and festivities the weddings were celebrated. And thereafter King Dasharatha went back with his sons and their brides to Ayodhya.

The king ruled for several years more over Ayodhya, until at last he began to grow weary beneath the weight of his many winters. He called his counsellors together. He told them that Prince Rama was now in the flower of his manhood, and that it was best that he should become king over Ayodhya and relieve him, King Dasharatha, of the weary burden of power. The counsellors agreed, and the word went forth that on the following day King Dasharatha would resign his diadem to his son Rama, and that Prince Rama would be crowned king over all the wide lands of Ayodhya. King Dasharatha called Rama to him and told him what had been ordered. And the king gave his son many a wise word of advice, how he should rule over the people entrusted to his care. And all that night Prince Rama and Princess Sita prayed to the immortals to give the prince strength and wisdom to rule Ayodhya firmly and justly and well, even as King Dasharatha and all the great house of Ikshwaku had done before him.

PRINCE BHIMA AND VAKA

NOW Prince Yudhishtira was the son of King Pandu, and the lawful heir to the kingdom of Hastinapura; but his uncle, Dhritarashtra, had usurped the throne when Yudhishtira and his four brothers, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadev were yet children. Further, Dhritarashtra sought to hand over the kingdom to his own wicked son, Duryodhan, rather than to his nephew Yudhishtira. And Duryodhan turned his father against the Pandavas—as men called the sons of King Pandu—by telling Dhritarashtra false tales about their plots against him.

At last Dhritarashtra induced his nephews and their mother, Queen Kunti, to go on a pleasant trip to his beautiful palace at Varanavata. When Yudhishtira, his mother and brothers reached the palace, they at first marvelled at its beauty: but soon Yudhishtira noticed that the furniture and the tapestries were soaked in oil, and he guessed that the purpose of Dhritarashtra was to burn them all alive. He told Queen Kunti and his brothers, and they fled from the palace. On reaching the safety of the woods Yudhishtira sent back his brother Bhima to avenge them on the guard. And Bhima set fire to the guard-house, in which the guard slept, and the flames consumed them utterly. Thus fell into their own snare the soldiers who would have slain the lawful heir of Hastinapura.

Now Queen Kunti and her sons, after leaving Prince Bhima, had gone due south until they came

to a town called Ekachakra, where, still dressed as Brahmin beggars, they asked for and were given a lodging in the house of a Brahmin who lived there. By day the brothers begged flour, and in the evening Queen Kunti baked it for them with her own hands. One day, when the sons had gone out to beg and she sat alone in the house, she heard the Brahmin and his family talking to one another, as if in great sorrow. 'I shall go,' said the Brahmin, 'for I cannot keep my life in exchange for either thine, my wife, or that of any of our children.' 'Nay, my husband,' sobbed the Brahmin's wife, 'I must go in thy stead. For if thou diest, who will give bread to our little ones?' 'My parents,' interposed their daughter, 'you gave me life. It is for me now to repay your gift. You stay at home and I shall go with the cart of food.'

The queen rose and entered the room where the Brahmin and his wife and his daughter were. 'My host,' said the queen, 'what is thy trouble?' 'Our trouble is very great,' replied the Brahmin. 'The town Ekachakra, in which we live, has been conquered by a fierce and cruel chief, called Vaka. In other respects he rules us well and guards us from our enemies. But every week we have to send him as food a cartful of rice, two buffaloes, and a man or a woman from one of the townspeople's houses. To each house the turn comes in due order. And if the house to which the turn has come fails to send him his weekly tribute, he enters the town with his guards and slays and devours every man and woman in the house which has left his tribute unpaid. Today the turn has come to our house, and we are trying to decide who among

us shall go as Vaka's blood-tax with the cart of food.' The queen thought for a moment, and then said with a sigh, 'If my son Bhima were but here, he would soon rid your town of this pest. But he is far away, wandering through the woods with the maid Hidimva.' As the words left her lips, a shadow fell across the floor, and looking up, she saw that her son Bhima stood in the doorway. With a joyful cry she rose and said, 'Thou art welcome, my son,' and she told him the grief of the Brahmin and the cruel tax laid on the town by the fierce chief Vaka. 'Have no fear, my mother,' said Bhima. 'I shall gladly go with the rice-cart and fight this pest of Ekachakra.'

That evening the Brahmin filled a cart with rice, and yoking to it two buffaloes, he made it over to Bhima. The prince took the cart and drove it to a spot in the woods near which, as he had learned, the fierce chief, Vaka, had his dwelling. There Bhima called Vaka by name, and sat down quietly and began to eat the rice from the cart. When Vaka heard his name called, he left his dwelling and came to where Bhima sat eating. Enraged at the sight, Vaka tore down the bough of a tree, and, rushing at Bhima, aimed with it a fearful blow at the prince's head. Bhima skilfully caught the branch in his left hand, and with his right gripped Vaka round the waist. Vaka, with the force of his own blow, fell forward, with Bhima above him. Bhima placed his knee on Vaka's back and said to him, 'It is time the forest was rid of a pest like thee.' Then, seizing Vaka's neck with one hand, and his waist-cloth with the other, and pressing downwards with his knee, Bhima broke in

two the backbone of the cruel chief. After he had died, Bhima dragged his body to one of the gates of the town, so that all the citizens of Ekachakra might know that they need pay the blood-tax no more to their wicked lord. When next morning the citizens saw his dead body lying by the gate, they clapped their hands, shouting and dancing with joy, and prostrated themselves in hundreds at Bhima's feet, because he had freed them from the monster Vaka.

After a few days had passed, Queen Kunti felt that she and her sons had stayed long enough as the guests of the Brahmin of Ekachakra. So they thanked him for his kindness and set forth again on their wanderings. Now it so happened that about this time King Drupada of the Panchalas issued a proclamation. In it he invited all the Aryan princes to Panchala, to meet in an archery contest, of which the prize was the hand of Draupadi, the dark princess, who had come to him in the sacrificial fire. For King Drupada knew that the Bharatas were all skilled men-at-arms, and he hoped that one or other of them would come to Panchala and there win the contest.

It chanced that Queen Kunti and her sons came to one of the roads that led to Panchala city, and they saw that a great concourse of people was walking towards it. Seeing a company of Brahmins, Prince Yudhishtira asked their leader, 'Pray, tell me, holy sir, why do men go in such crowds to Panchala city?' The Brahmin looked at the prince and said, 'Methinks, sir, thou art a stranger in these parts; or else thou wouldst surely know that King Drupada is to hold an archery contest, and

that he has promised to bestow on the winner the hand of his lovely daughter, the Princess Draupadi.'

When Prince Arjuna heard these words his eyes glittered, for he knew that in all India there was no archer his equal. So he whispered a word to his brother, and Yudhishtira turned again to the Brahmin and said : 'Thou art right, holy sir, we are indeed strangers and have heard nothing of this archery contest. But if thou and thy friends will give us leave—for we also are of the Brahmin caste, although very poor—we will gladly go in your company to Panchala. For we would fain see the archery contest and the lovely daughter of the king, the Princess Draupadi.' The Brahmins welcomed the Pandavas as fellow-travellers, and, marching by day and camping by night, they gradually drew near to Panchala city. At last they saw in front of them frowning walls and turreted gates, crowned with guards and archers. And one of the Brahmins said to the Pandavas, 'Fair sirs, we have come to our journey's end. The gates in front of us are those of King Drupada's city.'

The Winning of Draupadi

When the Pandavas and Queen Kunti entered the gates of Panchala, they parted from their friends the Brahmin wayfarers, and as wandering Brahmins begged for themselves a lodging in a potter's house. Their food they begged from the crowds who had come to Panchala to see the princes of India strive against each other for the hand of the lovely Draupadi.

Now King Drupada had prepared a mighty

arena to the north-east of Panchala city. Round it he had built tiers and tiers of seats. Above them he had caused a canopy to be spread to shield the spectators from the sun's rays. The stairs that led to the seats were covered with rich carpets. Flowers hung down in festoons joining together the columns that supported the canopy.

On the day fixed for the judging, vast though the arena was, it was yet too small for the huge crowds of sightseers who sought to enter it, so that the guards at the doors had to turn them away in hundreds. At the appointed hour a Brahmin priest entered the arena, and after sacrificing to the immortal gods, he called down a blessing on the wooing of the princes, and prayed that the immortals should order that the bravest and most skilful suitor present should win the hand of King Drupada's daughter. When the prayers had ended, a door at the far end of the arena was flung wide open, and every eye turned in that direction. Nor could any eye that had turned thither turn anywhere else, for it rested on a vision of beauty such as had never before been seen in all the lands of the Aryans. Surrounded by her serving-women, clad in her robes of state, and sparkling with jewels, there entered with slow steps the lovely princess, the dark maiden whom King Drupada had taken from the sacrificial fire. She was in the earliest spring of womanhood. And she bore in her hands the garland of flowers with which she was to deck the prince whom the judges should proclaim the winner among her wooers. The heart of every suitor who gazed on her beat wellnigh to bursting. And each prayed to the god who had watched over his fathers to bestow on

him tenfold strength and skill, that he might bear away the lovely princess, the prize of the contest.

After the dark maiden had taken her seat high above the other spectators, the king's son, Prince Dhrishtadyumna, rose from his throne, which was next to that of the Princess Draupadi, and spoke in a voice so clear and loud that it rang through the arena like the notes of a bugle call, saying, 'Hear, O ye princes! He among you who possesses birth and beauty and strength, and would win for his wife this my sister, Draupadi, must shoot, from the bow which I shall give him, an arrow through a ring fastened high above the ground. Nor shall he be permitted to look directly at the mark. He must aim by gazing at the reflection of the ring in a tank of water at his feet.' Dhrishtadyumna then sat down; and the princes came forward to compete for the hand of the lovely Draupadi. To one after another of them Dhrishtadyumna gave the bow. But so stiff was its wood that one prince after another tried in vain to bend it, and had to leave the arena weeping with vexation, amid the laughter of the spectators.

Then a youth, tall and strong, whose name was Karna, stepped forward and, taking the bow lightly in his left hand, with his right pulled the string towards him until the points of the great bow began to draw near to each other. Now Karna was the son of the Sun-god and Queen Kunti. For the Sun-god had loved Queen Kunti when she was still a maiden, and to keep his birth secret, she had hidden her newly-born son in a basket and put it to float upon the Aswa river. The Aswa river bore the basket to the Ganges. And from the

waves of the Ganges the kindly wife of a charioteer, named Adhiratha, had rescued the child and had adopted it as her own. None save the charioteer and his wife and Queen Kunti knew Karna's real birth, and all thought that he was but the son of Adhiratha. So when the Princess Draupadi saw Karna take and bend the bow, her heart filled with scorn at the thought that a charioteer's son should seek her as his bride. She rose in her seat, and in a voice so sweet and high that her words sounded like the notes of a bell through the mighty arena, she cried, 'I shall never take as my husband the son of a charioteer!' When Karna heard her words, he threw down the bow and left the arena, hiding his vexation beneath feigned laughter, for his heart was raging with unquenchable anger.

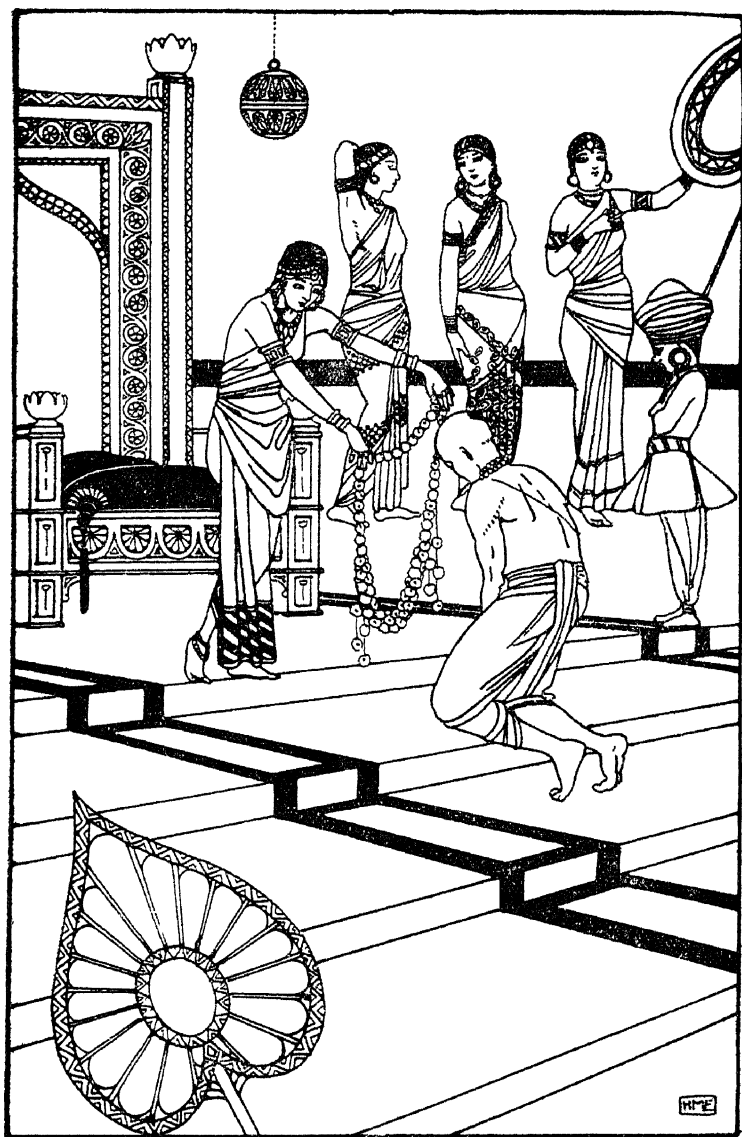
Prince Dhrishtadyumna was about to dismiss the suitors and to announce that none was qualified to win his sister's hand, when Prince Arjuna, in the guise of a Brahmin beggar, strode into the arena. At first the other suitors laughed to see a Brahmin beggar hope to win where they, the heirs of great kingdoms, had failed. But when they saw Prince Arjuna's mighty arms, deep chest, and noble bearing, they held their peace and watched him with bated breath and anxious eyes. Prince Arjuna took the bow, twanged the bowstring, and drew it towards him without seeming effort. Then, gazing steadfastly at the reflection of the ring in the tank of water close to his feet, he drew the bowstring to his ear and let the arrow fly.

So surely aimed was the shaft that it rose right through the very centre of the ring. And the myriad spectators cheered and shouted with joy and

showered garlands on the gallant young wooer who had done the task set him. But the princes who had failed to bend the bow gathered in a dark mass at the far end of the arena. And one muttered to the other, 'Who is this Brahmin beggar who dares to woo a royal princess? How can a Kshatriya maiden wed one of another caste? Let us kill this vagabond and carry off the lovely Draupadi, and draw lots for her among ourselves!' And they rushed at Prince Arjuna and would have torn him limb from limb, had his brothers not hastened to his help. To Prince Arjuna's right side went his brother, the wise Yudhishtira. To his left side went the giant Bhima.¹ And to the sides of Yudhishtira and Bhima stepped those two matchless swordsmen, Nakula and Sahadev. When the princes saw the mighty frames and resolute faces of the five Brahmin beggars, they drew back again towards the far end of the arena. For their hearts sank within them.

But Karna, from whom rage, because of the slight put upon him, had cast out fear, strode forward and challenged Prince Arjuna to fight. And Prince Shalya, who had come from Madra, a far land, in the hope of winning Draupadi, challenged Prince Bhima to wrestle with him. But Prince Arjuna gave Karna such a buffet that he rolled senseless on the ground. And Prince Bhima lifted Shalya in his arms, as if he had been a child, and threw him clear over the arena walls, but with such dexterity that Shalya landed on his feet and felt no hurt. When the other princes saw what had

¹ See last tale, pages 53 and 54.



SHE PLACED HER GARLAND ROUND PRINCE ARJUNA'S NECK.

befallen Karna and Shalya, they slunk crestfallen out of the arena and went to their various homes. Then Prince Arjuna walked to the foot of the throne, from which the lovely Princess Draupadi was gazing at him in fond admiration. With a loving smile she placed her garland round Prince Arjuna's neck. Then he knew that he had won her heart until death should part them. And through the cheering crowds he led Draupadi with him out of the arena.

Now Queen Kunti had not gone to the archery contest, but had stayed behind at the potter's hut. As time passed and the Pandavas did not return, she began to revolve in her mind the possible dangers which might have befallen them. At last she heard Arjuna's footstep without. And she heard him, say, 'Lo ! mother, we have today secured abundant alms !' The queen, not knowing that he spoke in jest and meant by 'alms' the lovely Princess Draupadi, replied joyfully, 'It is well, my sons; share the alms all five of you.' When she had spoken and Prince Arjuna led before her the dark maid of the Panchalas, Queen Kunti realized too late that she had ordered the lovely princess to be the bride of all her five sons.

When Prince Dhrishtadyumna bestowed on Prince Arjuna his blushing sister, he wondered greatly who the five Brahmin beggars could be. Their noble bearing betrayed them to be no beggars, but sons of kings. The archery of one of them was such that only Prince Arjuna could have equalled it. The strength of him who had hurled Shalya out of the arena must be no less than that of Prince Bhima. The beggars, moreover, numbered

five just as the Pandavas did. But then all men thought that the Pandavas had perished in the flames of the Varanavata palace. Prince Dhrishtadyumna resolved to spy on them and find out who these seeming beggars were. He traced them to the potter's cottage, and hid himself close by. In no long time he heard Queen Kunti's voice. She was instructing the Princess Draupadi how to serve Prince Arjuna and his brothers with food. 'First,' said Queen Kunti, 'give half of all the food cooked to Prince Bhima. For his giant frame needs as much as do all the others. Then divide the remaining half between Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadev, myself and yourself.'

When Prince Dhrishtadyumna heard the queen utter their names, he crept out of his hiding-place and made his way back to King Drupada's palace. There he told the king, his father, that the five Brahmin beggars were the Pandavas disguised, and that he who had won the dark princess was none other than Prince Arjuna, the greatest bowman in all the lands of the Aryans. When King Drupada heard the news brought him by his son, he rejoiced mightily, for he knew well the hatred which Prince Duryodhan bore to his cousins. And he guessed that through this hatred his curse would bear good fruit, and bring about the destruction of the Bharatas. He sent a priest to call the Brahmin beggars to his palace. There they owned, in answer to King Drupada's questions, that they were the sons of King Pandu, who had ruled over the wide lands of Hastinapura.

King Drupada loudly expressed his joy that he who had won the hand of the dark princess was

Prince Arjuna, and therefore of royal blood. And he said that he would without delay make ready for the nuptials of the prince and his daughter. Then Yudhishtira arose from his seat and said, 'O king, the Princess Draupadi must wed all five of us in turn, and not only my younger brother Arjuna.' And he told the king how the queen had said, 'My sons, share the alms, all five of you,' and he added that, however strange such a marriage might seem, it was better that it should take place than that the word of an Aryan queen should be set aside. But King Drupada was loath to consent. So he referred the matter to a very holy seer, called Vyasa. And Vyasa, after hearing both King Drupada and Prince Yudhishtira, ruled that, strange though such a marriage might be, it was yet sinless. And it was better that it should take place than that the saying of an Aryan queen should go unheeded. King Drupada perforce gave his consent, and, summoning his friends and kinsmen and nobles, he held a mighty feast in honour of the wedding. On an auspicious day he gave the Princess Draupadi in marriage to Prince Yudhishtira. And on four successive days he gave her in turn to Prince Bhima, Prince Arjuna, Prince Nakula, and Prince Sahadev. Thus it came about that the five Pandavas wedded and took to their home the lovely dark maiden the Princess Draupadi, who rose from the sacrificial fire to bring about the ruin of the Bharatas.

The Year of Disguise

Month by month the twelve weary years of exile added themselves to each other and neared

their end. And many adventures came to the Pandava princes in the forest. But at last the twelfth year was complete, and they had to choose in which of the cities of India they should live disguised, and how they should disguise themselves so that their concealment might not be pierced by the sharp-eyed spies of Prince Duryodhan. For everywhere he tracked the movements of the Pandavas, so that he might, when they had hidden themselves, penetrate their disguise and thus force them to suffer another twelve years of exile. After weighing in their minds the various cities of India, they at last resolved to live for a year in Viratnagar, the capital town of Virata, the kindly king of the Matsyas.

Now Prince Yudhishtira had, during the twelve years of exile, constantly practised dice-throwing, so that, if King Shakuni challenged him again, he should not ruin the Pandavas as he had done before. In this way Prince Yudhishtira had become as skilled as King Shakuni himself. So when the dark Princess Draupadi asked him what disguise he would take, he answered, 'I shall take the name of Kanka and shall put on the dress of a gambler.' Prince Bhima, who had, by cooking the food for himself and his brothers, become a skilled cook, said, 'I shall take the name of Ballaba and put on the dress of a cook.' Prince Arjuna, who danced and sang more skilfully than any mortal man, said, 'I shall take the name of Vrihannala and assume the guise of a dancer and singer.' Prince Nakula said, 'I shall take the name of Granthika and shall become a groom; for I love horses and can do a groom's work.' Prince Sahadev said, 'I shall take

the name of Tantripala and become a cowherd ; for from my childhood I have ever loved cattle, and shall not mind tending them.' Last of all, the princess Draupadi said, ' I shall take the name of Sairandhri, and I shall disguise myself as a waiting-maid and tire-woman.' And when all the brothers and the princess had settled what names and disguises they would take, they set out for the distant town of Viratnagar, wherein ruled the kindly Virata, king of the Matsyas.

When they neared the city walls, Prince Yudhishtira said to Prince Arjuna, ' My brother, we should go no farther without hiding our weapons ; else they will betray us, especially the Gandiva bow, which the god Agni gave thee, and the golden armour which the god Indra bestowed on thee in the Himalayas.' Prince Arjuna replied, ' Wisely spoken, my brother. I see a burning-ground close to us. Let us hide our weapons and armour therein. For in a burning-ground none will care to search for them.'

Towards the burning-ground they went. In it there grew a mighty thorn-tree,¹ and Prince Arjuna said, ' Let us hide our arms and our armour in the thorn-tree.' The brothers in turn handed to Prince Nakula their weapons and their harness, and he tied them securely inside the branches of the thorn-tree. Now there happened to lie close to the tree the dead body of an old woman which her kinsmen had borne to the burning-ground, but had been too undutiful to burn. Prince Nakula lifted it up and tied it also to the tree, so that all passers-by might fear to look inside its branches.

¹ The particular thorn-tree is called a shami-tree.

And to one or two passers-by, who had stopped to gaze at them, Prince Arjuna said, 'This is our old mother. It is the custom of our tribe to expose and not burn our dead.' The passers-by, satisfied with his words, tarried no longer, but went their way.

Then one by one the Pandavas made their way to Viratnagar. First, Prince Yudhishtira asked for an audience with King Virata. And when the prince entered the audience room, the king marvelled at his noble face and royal bearing, and said 'Who art thou, fair stranger, and why dost thou come to our city?' Prince Yudhishtira bowed low and said, 'O king, I am a Brahmin, Kanka by name, and I am a skilled dicer. If thy days, O king, are weary, I shall beguile them. If thy nights, O king, are long, I shall make them pass swiftly.' King Virata's heart warmed towards the noble stranger, and he replied, 'O Kanka, thou must come to my palace and be my courtier. When the hours seem heavy, I shall call thee and we shall lighten them by casting dice together.'

A few hours later Prince Bhima entered the town gates, with a cooking ladle and a spoon in one hand and a sword in the other. And he, too, asked for and obtained an audience with King Virata. The king wondered at the huge shoulders and thighs of Prince Bhima, and asked, 'Who art thou, fair stranger? From thy giant build I should say that thou art one of the heroes of Indraprastha. But thy garb is the garb of a cook.' Prince Bhima answered in humble tones, 'Nay, O king, I am no hero. I am but a cook and my name is Ballaba; yet, if thou dost hire me as thy servant, thou wilt never regret it. For I surpass all men

in the art of making curries and other delicacies. 'So be it, Ballaba,' said King Virata, 'I take thee as my cook.'

Yet a few hours later there came to the main city gate the dark princess of the Panchalas. Her dress was torn and soiled. Yet, in spite of her rags, her beauty shone undiminished, and she looked more lovely by far than the fairest of the Matsya maidens. As Queen Sudeshna, King Virata's wife, drove through the city for her evening drive, she saw the beautiful princess at the edge of the road. Queen Sudeshna bade her charioteer stay his horses, so that she might speak with the lovely but ill-dressed woman who stood by the roadside. 'Who art thou, fair girl?' asked Queen Sudeshna. 'Thou must be a stranger. For didst thou live always in Virata, I should surely have noticed thy beauty before.' 'O queen,' said the dark princess, 'thy words are true. I am a stranger, and my name is Sairandhri. I am a tire-woman, and I have come from a far country in search of employment. And if thou wilt take me as thy maidservant, thou wilt never regret it. For I am the most skilled tire-woman in all India.' 'So be it,' said the kindly queen. 'Go to my palace, and from tonight I take thee as my serving-maid.'

Next day the king drove abroad to see his thousand kine that grazed along the meadows round Virata. In the meadows he saw a strange cowherd. He sent for him and asked him his name. The cowherd replied, 'I come from northern India, and my name is Tantripala. And if thou wilt but take me in thy service, thou wilt not regret it. For I am the most skilled of all the cowherds in India.'

‘So be it,’ said the kindly king. ‘From today thou art one of my cowherds.’ Thus, under the name of Tantripala, Prince Sahadev became King Virata’s cowherd.

As King Virata’s chariot bore him homeward, he saw near the city gate a man in a dancer’s dress. The king thought that he had never before seen so noble a form and face. He said, ‘Fair stranger, who art thou? and what dost thou in the dress of a dancer? Of a truth the gods made thy shoulders to bear armour and not to shake in time to a dancer’s steps. For thou art more stalwart by far than any of my guardsmen.’ The stranger said with downcast eyes, ‘O king, forgive me. I am no warrior and I know nothing of arms or armour, but I surpass all men in dancing and singing. If thou wilt hire me to teach dancing and singing to the ladies of thy house, they will soon surpass in skill the Gandharvas of Amravati.’ ‘So be it,’ said King Virata, ‘from today I hire thee to teach dancing and singing to my women-folk.’

Last of all King Virata went to his stables. Standing close to one of his horses, he saw a strange groom. ‘Who art thou?’ said King Virata. The groom replied, ‘I am a groom, Granthika by name, and I seek service. Today one of thy grooms is dead, and I offer myself as thy servant in his stead. And if thou wilt take me as thy horse-tender thou wilt never regret it. For I shall care for thy horses as no other groom in India would.’ ‘So be it. Take the place of my dead groom,’ said the king to the Prince Nakula. But after a moment he added sharply enough, ‘But look to it that thy deeds equal thy words. For I love not idle boasters.’

Thus the five Pandavas and the dark princess found various kinds of service with King Virata. And soon he grew to esteem them all greatly. For with Kanka the king passed merrily in dicing many hours which else would have passed with leaden feet. And the dinners cooked by Ballaba far surpassed those which the king's other cooks had prepared for him in the days gone by. Vrihannala, too, taught the king's ladies so skilfully to dance and sing, that he never grew weary of watching them or listening to them. And his kine grew from one to many thousands under Tantripala's fostering care. His horses never fell ill, so untiring was the service of the groom Granthika. While Queen Sudeshna vowed that in all India there was no tire-woman to equal her serving-maid, Sairandhri.

When twelve months had all but passed, there returned from a foreign war Queen Sudeshna's brother, Prince Kichaka. He was the bravest and fiercest warrior in all the wild lands of Viratnagar. All men, even the kindly king himself, feared his savage temper and reckless daring. And all women feared to meet his gaze. For many a maid in Viratnagar had lived to rue the day when his wicked eyes had first rested on her and found her fair. Prince Kichaka at once on entering the city did homage to King Virata. Next he went to see his sister, Queen Sudeshna. As he talked to her, his eye fell on the lovely serving-maid, Sairandhri. And he begged Queen Sudeshna to send the maid to his palace. The queen loved her brother so dearly that she could refuse him nothing. Sorely against her will, she bade Sairandhri make ready a tray of food and wine, and take it with her to Prince Kichaka's

palace. Sairandhri said, 'O queen, forgive me. I am thy tire-woman and I gladly do thy bidding. But I fear to go to Prince Kichaka's palace.' Queen Sudeshna, seeking to cajole her, said in a soft voice, 'Nay, fear not, fair Sairandhri. No one in Viratnagar, not even my brother, would dare to wrong a serving-maid from the king's palace.' Trusting the queen's soft words, Sairandhri said, 'So be it, O queen. I trust thee, and will take the tray of food and wine to Prince Kichaka's palace.'

Slowly and with sinking heart, the dark princess set out with the tray to Prince Kichaka's palace. No sooner had she entered the door, than Prince Kichaka seized her by the waist and sought to embrace her. But the dark princess freed herself lightly from his clasp, and, throwing in his face the tray of food and wine, fled back as fast as she could to King Virata's palace. Behind her, maddened with rage, Prince Kichaka ran swifter still. Overtaking her as she entered the palace door, he struck her face with his clenched fist. The princess all but fell. Then recovering herself, she fled straight on to the audience room of King Virata and burst into it unannounced. There she showed her bleeding face to the king, and, telling him her story, cried aloud to him for justice. But King Virata feared to cross Prince Kichaka. He laughed at Draupadi, and said to her lightly, 'Nay, I think thou thyself art the cruel one, fair waiting-maid, else thou would'st never have left the prince's love unrequited.'

The dark princess answered nothing. Speechless with shame and anger, she slipped away from the audience room amid the laughter of the courtiers. She searched through the palace until

she found Prince Bhima asleep in his room. She roused him and cried, 'My lord, shame on thee. Thou sleepest while thy wife suffers cruel wrong. Unless thou dost avenge me on Prince Kichaka, thou art no more husband of mine.' Then she told Bhima what had passed in Prince Kichaka's palace. The Pandava's mighty chest heaved with rage and his brow grew as dark as a northern winter, while he listened to her tale. 'Fear not, princess of the Panchalas,' he said, holding out his huge hands, 'tomorrow night I will slay the monster with these. There is a dancing-hall in a distant part of the palace. Bid Prince Kichaka meet thee there tomorrow night. And I, instead of thee, will await his coming, and he shall not leave my loving embrace alive.' The dark princess smiled at the grim jest, and went away glad at heart.

Next morning she saw to it that Prince Kichaka should meet her. She looked at him from under her downcast lids and smiled. Kichaka thought her anger had passed and that she wished him to renew his suit. He came near her and craved her pardon for his conduct on the previous day. Again the princess looked at him and smiled. Falling into her snare, he begged her to give him a meeting. Blushing, she whispered to him, 'Prince Kichaka, if thou wilt promise to keep our secret faithfully, I shall meet thee tonight in the dancing-hall in the distant part of the royal palace.' Prince Kichaka, of course, gave her his promise, and filled with joy, he went his way.

That evening, as darkness fell, Prince Bhima went to the dancing-hall and hid himself there.

And after everyone in the palace had gone to rest, he heard Prince Kichaka come tiptoe through the passage and enter the room. Through the darkness, Prince Kichaka saw a form in the room, and he thought that the waiting-maid was before him at the tryst. 'Pardon me, fair maid,' he whispered, 'for my delay. For, of a truth no maid hath ever moved my heart as thou hast.'

But as the words left his lips, Prince Bhima came close to him and whispered with a mocking laugh, 'Thou shalt love fair maids no more, valiant prince, for I will so deal with thee tonight that no maid shall know hereafter that thou ever wert a man.'

Prince Kichaka, although taken unawares, was a brave man, and said, 'Who thou art, I know not. But it is easy to threaten. It is hard to perform.' Then both Bhima and Kichaka sprang at each other through the darkness. And they wrestled and fought up and down the dancing-hall, through the passage, and back again into the dancing-hall. At last Prince Kichaka's strength, weakened by evil living, began to fail. Prince Bhima, seeing this, put forth his full force and threw Prince Kichaka on the ground. Kneeling on him, he gripped his throat with both his hands. Nor did he loosen his grip until Kichaka had ceased to breathe. Then, taking hold of his body, he kneaded it and pounded it, and rolled it up and down the floor until at last none could have said whether the body had been that of a man or of an animal.

When he had finished, the dark princess came to his side. For, unknown to Bhima, she had followed Prince Kichaka, so that she might see his death. She smiled on Bhima and said, 'Well done,

my lord. Thou hast made clean my honour and that of the Pandavas.' The prince rose and embraced her and said, 'Draupadi, go thou and rouse the other maidservants and say to them, "O serving-maids, Prince Kichaka is dead. My husband, who is an immortal, caught him with me. And, finding us together, my husband slew him."' The dark princess went and roused the palace maids and said to them, 'O serving-maids, what shall I do? I had a tryst with Prince Kichaka. My husband, who is an immortal, caught us together and slew him.' The serving-maids went back with Draupadi to the dancing-hall. And when they saw that nothing remained of Queen Sudeshna's brother but a shapeless mass of flesh, they said to Draupadi, 'Thy husband must indeed be an immortal, for no man born of woman could have used the prince so shamefully.'

KABIR

THE saint Kabir was the incarnation of the Rishi Shuk. He was not born of woman, but came into the world in this manner. One day at Manikanika Ghat a certain Mussulman weaver, Tamal-momin by name, was washing some bundles of thread in the sacred stream. As he washed them, he heard the cry of 'Ram, Ram', and looking down, saw a shell floating by. He picked it out, and, opening it, saw inside a beautiful little baby boy. He went home as pleased as one who, thinking that he is journeying to Yama's halls, finds himself at the gates of Vishnu's paradise. When his wife saw the little boy, she was so pleased that, although not a mother, she was able to nurse it. She and her husband gave the little boy the name of Kabir. Although brought up a Mussulman, he never ceased to repeat the name of Ram. Often through thinking too deeply of the divine Ramchandra, he would swoon and lie unconscious by his loom. Then the Lord Krishna, fearing that Kabir's mother would beat him, would come and himself work the loom, while the child lay unconscious. One day Kabir came to himself while the Lord Krishna was still working at a gold-embroidered shawl. The god did not vanish, but remained working at the loom with Kabir. So god and saint combined their labour, just as the waters of the Saraswati mingle inseparably with those of the Ganges.

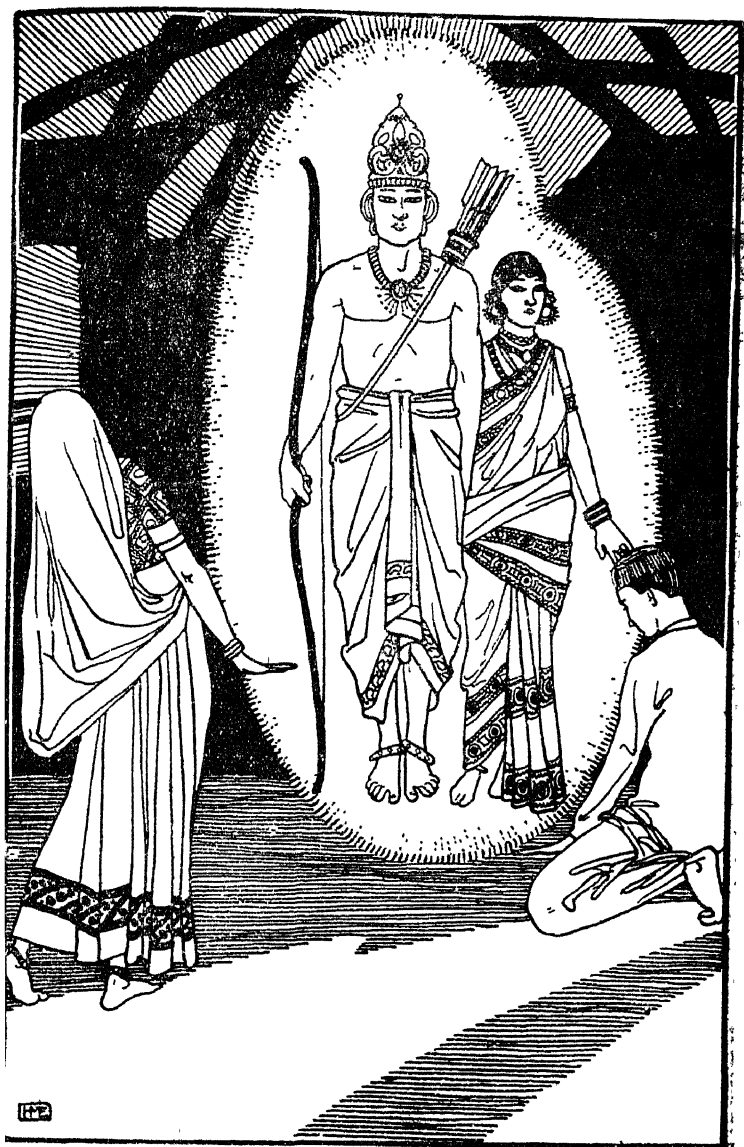
When the shawl was finished, Kabir folded it reverently and took it to his mother. She bade

him take it to the market-place and sell it. It was market day, and traders came to look at Kabir's shawl. But to those who were willing to pay five rupees for a shawl, it seemed to be worth ten. To those who would have given ten it seemed to be worth twenty. To those willing to give five hundred rupees, it seemed worth a thousand. So no one asked Kabir to sell it, because each thought that it was of a better quality than what he needed. And all the time Kabir paid no heed to those who thronged the market-place; for he sat motionless and repeated, without ceasing, the name of Ram.

When the sun set and the market-place emptied, Kabir, whose shawl was still unsold, was afraid to go home, lest his mother should beat him. He stole away and hid himself in a ruined house, like a little wife who fears her mother-in-law's tongue. The Lord Krishna took the form of an aged Brahmin. Though the night was bitterly cold, he wore only a single tattered rag to cover his nakedness. He went up to Kabir and said in a whining voice, 'I am old and poor, and I have no clothes this bitter night. If you have any, give them to me, I entreat you.' Kabir thought to himself, 'If I send away a Brahmin without a gift it will be a sin.' He tore the costly shawl in half, and gave one half to the Brahmin. The Brahmin left, and Kabir began to sing a hymn softly to himself in the lonely house. The Lord Krishna went away a few steps and took the form of a wandering mendicant. His hair was matted, bells tinkled round his ankles, a necklace of flint beads hung round his neck, he carried in his hand a rosary, and his eyes glared out of their red-rimmed sockets.

He went to the door of Kabir's ruined house and gave a shout of frenzied laughter. Then he asked Kabir to give him some clothes. 'You are a Mussulman,' he added, 'yet you sit here singing hymns to Rama.' Kabir replied gently, 'God is one, whether he be called Allah or Rama, just as the brightness of gold remains the same whether it is a nugget or a jewel.' 'Give me some clothes,' repeated the fakir. Kabir handed him the half shawl that remained, and the fakir, taking it, went away. Then Kabir rejoiced. He no longer grieved that no customer had bought the shawl. Had he sold it, he could not have done this act of charity. With the shawl had gone his troubles. So he felt like the sun when it has escaped from Rahu, or the ocean after the gods had ceased to churn it with Mandara Mountain.

The Lord Krishna next took the form of a Brahmin, and going to Kabir's house said to his mother: 'I saw Kabir sitting in the market-place. Customers wished to buy his shawl, but his thoughts were far away and he would give them no answer. When the market was over, he tore his shawl in two and gave half to a Brahmin and half to a fakir. He is now sitting in a ruined house. I saw him, so I thought I would tell you.' When Kabir's mother heard this tale she grew very angry, and when the Brahmin offered to take her to Kabir she went with him. They went to the ruined house and saw Kabir sitting and praising Ramchandra, as Sita did in Ravana's Asoka forest. Kabir's mother said, 'Bring me the shawl. If you have not got it I shall punish you.' But Kabir did not heed her, for his thoughts were far away. His mother grew more and more angry



AS RAMCHANDRA HE SHOWED HIMSELF TO KABIR.

and began to scold him. But the Brahmin said, 'What is the use of scolding him? Whip him.' As he spoke, he thrust a cane into her hands. With it she struck Kabir on the back, but he felt no pain.

Suddenly the Lord Krishna threw aside his disguise. In his hands appeared the bow, on his back the quiver. A diadem rose above his brow. His eyes shone with celestial splendour. On his mighty chest shone the Kaustubha jewel. Diamond-studded anklets rang upon his feet. In his hand he held the hand of Queen Sita, and as Ramchandra he showed himself to Kabir. 'You did me a favour,' he said, 'and I shall remember you always.' He then took Kabir's mother in his arms and gently embraced her. 'You are blessed above all women,' he said, 'to be the mother of such a son.' Then Kabir's mother embraced her son and said, 'Through you, my son, I have been vouchsafed a vision of Ramchandra.' Taking him by the hand she led him home. As they went the Lord Krishna said, 'Think of me always,' and vanished from their sight.

KABIR AND KAMAL

When Kabir grew to manhood, his wife bore him a son, whom they called Kamal. One evening a band of pilgrims came to Kabir's house. Both he and his wife went out to welcome them. For both rejoiced to see saintly men, even as the parched soil rejoices when it sees a storm of rain. After Kabir had greeted them, he told his wife to prepare a meal for them. But his wife taking him aside said, 'There is nothing in the house. I cannot prepare a meal.'

On hearing his wife's words, Kabir went out and

tried to borrow some grain from his neighbours. But no one would lend him any. 'Go', they said, 'and buy it in the village; why should we lend you any?' 'Alas!' answered Kabir, 'I have no money.' But even so the neighbours would lend him nothing, and in the end they shut their doors in his face. He turned to his son and said, 'We cannot send the pilgrims away empty. Let us go and steal some food for them.' Kabir girt on a sword. Kamal fetched a crowbar, and at midnight, when all were asleep, they went to a wealthy grocer's shop. They made a hole in the wall, and the son crawled through it. He did not touch the rich clothes and jewels, but passed to his father, through the hole, grain and rice, ghee and molasses, pulse and vegetables. When Kabir had got enough for the saints' dinner, he bade his son come out. But Kamal did not wish to go without telling the grocer what he had done, any more than he would have spoken evil of him behind his back. He went to the sleeping shop-keeper and, touching him gently, said, 'Wake up, Sir Merchant. I am one of two thieves who have just broken into your house. But I could not go without telling you.' The grocer sat up in bed and Kamal ran away. As he strove to get through the hole by which he had come, the grocer caught him by the legs. There he lay helpless, like a deer taken in a net or a swan in the talons of an eagle. Kamal said to his father, 'My father, the grocer has caught me by the legs and is dragging me back through the wall. If he sees my face, he will raise the whole town against us. The saints will not eat stolen food. They will flee from your house, just as a learned man does when a Mang enters his dwelling.

Cut off my head so that the grocer may not know who I am.' Kabir's heart sank within him when he heard his son's words. But he drew his sword and cut off Kamal's head. Then, taking it and the sack of stolen food, Kabir returned to his home. There he told his wife everything and showed her their son's head. She concealed her grief bravely, and taking the food, cooked it for the pilgrims' meal.

Next morning, when the sun rose, the pilgrims went to bathe in a neighbouring stream. As they went they heard an uproar. The whole village was thronging round the grocer's shop, where the grocer was displaying the headless body of the thief. The wiseacres of the village were wagging their heads over the body, and were arguing whether the grocer's merit had protected his wealth or whether the dead man had really been a thief. The grocer said, falsely, that he had surprised the robbers, so that they had been unable to take any of his things away. Then taking the headless corpse, the grocer complained to the king. The king grew very angry and bade his guards impale it. The pilgrims returned to Kabir's house and bade him farewell. His wife, although weeping, prostrated herself before them to do them homage. Then both husband and wife went with the pilgrims to see them off upon their journey. As they went they passed near the stake upon which Kamal's headless body was impaled. Suddenly both the hands of the body joined together and moved upwards, as if trying to meet the forehead. The pilgrims were amazed, and asked Kabir the cause. 'Can a bird', they asked, 'whose wings have been clipped, fly? Can a stringless lute

play music? Does the headless body, do you think, still live as Bhishma lived upon his bed of arrows?’

Kabir told the pilgrims all that had happened on the previous night. They went back with him to the hermitage. There Kabir's wife showed them her son's head. Returning with it to the stake they took down the impaled body. They placed the head upon it. Instantly Kamal came back to life, and fell at the feet of the pilgrims. The pilgrims in their turn prostrated themselves before Kabir, for whom the Lord Krishna had worked the miracle. And, singing the Lord Krishna's praises, they left the village and went rejoicing on their way.

KABIR AND RAMANAND

One day, as Kabir was walking through the village he saw a woman of the Bania caste grinding grain. He looked at her steadfastly for some time, and then burst into tears. The passers-by, men and women alike, laughed at him, saying, ‘Who has been teasing you, Kabir?’ But Kabir made them no answer, because he knew that they had no power to take away his grief. A frog does not ask for sympathy from a snake. A learned man does not seek wisdom from a drunkard. A Brahmin will not bestow a blessing if a Mang is near. So Kabir would not waste words on the fools who mocked him. Just then a saintly man called Nipat came up and asked Kabir the cause of his grief. Kabir answered him freely; because he knew that he would understand, ‘I saw’, he said, ‘the mill

grinding grain and I realized that I was even as the grain in the mill of life. I wept to think that I had no escape from it.' 'Nay,' said Nipat, 'your grief is causeless. The corn is only ground when put into the mill. But those who worship Ram escape from the mill of life.' Kabir was comforted by the saint's words, and after embracing the saint went on his way weaving poems in praise of Ramchandra.

One day Kabir thought to himself, 'He who has no spiritual teacher is like a lifeless corpse, or a childless house, or a partridge on a moonless night. I must go to the saint Ramanand.' With these words he went to Ramanand's door and cried, 'Lord, have mercy upon me.' But when Ramanand heard Kabir's words, he stopped his ears with his fingers and fled into his cave. But Kabir, standing outside the cave, renewed his prayer. 'Nay,' replied Ramanand, 'you are a Mussulman. I cannot instruct you in divine knowledge. The wise man judges of the soil before he sows his seed.' 'My Lord,' said Kabir, 'I am not deceiving you. I swear it with my mind, my tongue and my body. As the lotus adores the sun, so I adore your piety.' Ramanand would not leave his cave, so Kabir, after prostrating himself before the door, went homeward. As he sat at home one day, the wish came to him to hear the word 'Ram' uttered by Ramanand's lips. On the path from Ramanand's hermitage to the Ganges, he dug a cavity and lay in it. There, like the chatak bird waiting for the monsoon to burst, or the dry earth waiting for the thunderstorm, he lay and waited for Ramanand's coming.

Before dawn Ramanand came to bathe in the Ganges. As he went, his foot struck Kabir and he

exclaimed, 'Ram, Ram'. Kabir sprang up, and throwing himself at Ramanand's feet exclaimed, 'When your foot touched my forehead, you said "Ram, Ram"'. I am now the happiest man in the three worlds. I am reaping my good acts in a former life. I am like one who looking for water has found rubies. I am as happy as a king when he first sits upon his throne. I feel as Maruti felt when he first saw Ramchandra.'

Ramanand said nothing in reply, but went to the water's edge. He marvelled at Kabir's resolution and resolved to test him by the touchstone of persecution. One day Kabir was walking through the village. As he walked he sang gaily, and cried aloud that Ramanand was his guru. Ramanand chanced to meet him, and, taking off one of his shoes, said angrily, 'How dare you say that I am your guru? You cannot bring a single witness to prove that I ever taught you anything.' With these words he rushed at Kabir and struck him on the head with his shoe. He was not, however, really angry with him, any more than a mother is who punishes her child, or an owner is who brands his horse to cure it of sickness. A stream of blood flowed from the spot where Ramanand had struck Kabir. But Kabir showed joy instead of anger. 'Ramanand wanted a witness,' he said. 'Now all the village has seen him teach me. The earth, wind and sky are my witnesses.' When Ramanand heard these words, he realized the steadfast heart of Kabir, and, going up to him, placed his hand upon his head. And the fame of Kabir's saintliness spread all through Benares.

Some, however, envied his fame and murmured

against him, just as the owl reviles the sun when it rises, or as thieves abuse the moon when it shows itself above the horizon. 'Forsooth,' they said, 'ever since Kabir killed his son, his renown has never ceased to grow and the most pious of men now bow before him. Let us, without warning Kabir, invite to his house and in his name all the anchorites of India. When he sees the vast multitude arrive he will run away and they will curse him.' Weaving this plot, they sent letters to Hardwar, to Mathura, to Vrindavan, to Gokula, and to Dwarka, inviting all the saints who dwelt there to visit Kabir on one and the same day. Then they awaited joyfully the coming of the guests, feeling sure that Kabir would either flee away and incur his visitors' wrath, or stay and ruin himself by feeding them. When the anchorites received the letters, they bowed their heads and set forth to Kabir's house. From east and west and north and south came the great multitude. But Kabir, undismayed, bowed to each one as he came and then embraced him.

When the Lord Krishna saw the cruel trick played upon Kabir, he hastened to the saint's aid. Multiplying himself, as he did of old when he danced with the milkmaids at Gokula, he made himself into a thousand Kabirs. He washed the feet of one saint, he sang to amuse another, he gave betel-nut to another. For others he crushed hemp in water, filled pipes or fetched opium. Round one saint's neck he put garlands. He sat talking with another. He anointed another with saffron paste. Then he prepared a mighty meal at which all sat and feasted, while a thousand Kabirs waved horse-tails round their heads. Thus he satisfied

the wants of every saint, just as in every pot you will find the sun's reflection.

When the feasting was over the Lord Krishna gave money and rich gifts of clothes to all the anchorites, and then, escorting them in a thousand forms to the outskirts of Benares, he vanished suddenly. When Kabir's enemies saw the miracle which the Lord Krishna had worked for him, they fell at his feet and said, 'Though the moth hates the lamp and tries to extinguish it, yet it burns all the more brightly. The hatred of the firefly for the sun but adds to its glory. So we who strove to persecute you have but added to your fame.' Kabir forgave them freely, and he and they sang together to the close of the day the praises and virtues of the Lord Krishna.

SENA THE BARBER

ONCE upon a time there lived a barber called Sena. Low though his caste was, he worshipped the Lord Krishna until the god at last had pity on him. And, because the Lord Krishna had pity on him, the baseness of his calling fell from him completely. For when a muddy stream joins the Ganges, its waters become as holy as hers. When iron touches the parisa stones, it becomes pure gold. When sin touches the Lord Krishna it vanishes utterly. Thus, when the Lord Krishna accepted the worship of Sena, the barber became even as the god whom he worshipped.

One day, when Sena the barber sat worshipping Krishna's image, the king's messenger came hot-foot to his house and bade him go to the palace and shave the king. His wife gave Sena the message but he answered her, 'Tell the king's messenger that I am not in the house.' She did so, and the messenger went back to the palace. After his return the king sent three other messengers to call Sena there. But all received the same answer. Then an evilly disposed neighbour said to the last messenger, 'It is not true that Sena has left his house. He is there inside, worshipping Krishna's image. Tell the king the truth; tell him that Sena refuses to shave him until he is tired of saying his prayers. The messenger repeated this to the king. Now the king was a Mussulman, and grew as angry as a monkey maddened by wine or stung by a scorpion. He sent for his servants and

bade them seize Sena, sew him up in a leather well-bucket and fling him into the river. When the Lord Krishna heard the king give this cruel order, he at once took the form of Sena, and, with a box of razors hastened to the palace. Yes, he whom Brahmadeva and the other gods adore, he who is the source of all life, he who pervades the whole universe, he, the Lord Krishna, took the form of Sena the barber. He approached the king, bowing before him to the ground. Directly the king saw him, his anger vanished. The Lord Krishna shaved the king with surpassing skill and then shampooed his head. The king was so pleased that he bade the Lord Krishna stay with him and be his barber always. The Lord Krishna smiled, and rubbed the king all over with scented oil of the most exquisite perfume. Then he put before the king a gold cup full of moghra scent. When the king looked into it he saw the reflection of Krishna, four-armed, crowned and in his royal robes. The king fainted, but the Lord Krishna continued to rub his limbs. After a time the royal servants, thinking the king had fallen asleep, roused him. 'It is now midday,' they said: 'it is time that His Majesty had his bath.' The king recovered himself and said to the Lord Krishna, 'You must never go away; if you do, I shall die of grief.' 'Nay, lord king,' said the Lord Krishna smiling, 'I must go now; but I will come back soon. Do not forget me wholly.' The king took a double handful of gold coins and threw them into the other's lap. The Lord Krishna took them and went to Sena's house. There he replaced the box of razors and poured the gold coins on the ground. Then he vanished.

Some time after the king had bathed, he called his servants and bade them bring Sena to him. 'I shall die', he cried, 'if you do not bring him. Unless he is with me, my food has no flavour, perfumes have no fragrance, jewels no splendour.' His servants were amazed and ran off to fetch Sena. They brought him by force to the royal palace. As he entered the king's room, the king rose from his throne to greet him, heedless of the smiles of the courtiers. 'This morning', cried the king, 'you showed me in a cup of moghra scent a vision of a godlike figure with four arms, crowned and wearing royal robes. I want you to show it to me again.' Sena, who knew nothing of the king's vision, remained silent with wonder. The servants, at the king's command, brought the jewelled cup of gold and filled it with moghra scent. The king looked into it, but could see nothing. Then Sena guessed the truth. He said, 'It was not I who showed you the cup this morning. It was He who dwells in Vaikunth, the Help of the helpless, the Saviour of the world.' The king burst into tears, and falling at Sena's feet said, 'Because of you, the Lord Krishna vouchsafed to me a vision of his glory.' Then Sena divided among the Brahmins the gold coins which the king had given the god. And amid the wonder of the courtiers, the king and Sena began to sing hymns in praise of the Lord Krishna.

RAMDAS OF DAKOR

ONCE upon a time there lived at Dakor a pious Brahmin, who used every fortnight to go on a pilgrimage to Dwarka. He would take a staff of teakwood, in the handle of which he had planted a tulsi. When he saw Dwarka in the distance he would feel as glad as a peasant who sees rain fall in time of famine, or as a young wife when she sees her mother's house. He would bathe in the Gomti River, worship the Manas Lake and, lastly, offer his tulsi flowers to the Lord Krishna. For twenty-five years he thus went every fortnight to Dwarka. At last he grew weary and faint with years, and, throwing himself at the Lord Krishna's feet, he cried, 'This is my last visit. I have not the strength to come again to visit you.' The image smiled at him, and stretching out its four arms embraced him. 'Take me then with you,' said the Lord Krishna. 'But how can I?' asked Ramdas. 'Yoke horses tonight to my chariot and I shall sit in it. Then you can drive me to Dakor.' That night Ramdas yoked horses to the god's chariot. The instant that he had done so, he was aware that the massive idol of the Lord Krishna was seated in it. Whipping his horses, Ramdas drove with all speed to his native town.

Early next morning the priests went as usual to wave lights round the god to wake him. But the image was missing from the temple. They looked about and saw that the chariot was also gone, and that marks of its wheels ran along the road

to Dakor. Then they cried, 'Ramdas must have stolen the idol.' With all speed the priests and the pilgrims followed Ramdas's track. When he saw them coming he threw the image into a pond, and when the priests questioned him he told them falsely that he knew nothing of it. They searched his house, then all the houses in the village, then all the wells, and last of all the pond into which Ramdas had thrown the idol. While they were probing the bottom with their spears, the point of one entered its body and blood rose to the surface. 'Here he is,' they cried joyfully, 'we have found Ranchod.' Then, diving into the water, they took the idol out and seated it again in its chariot.

The pilgrims, happy at recovering the image, left it unguarded to eat their meal. Ramdas went up to it sadly and said, 'O Help of the helpless, Protector of the oppressed, to keep you I spoke falsely, yet you have deserted me.' But the image only smiled at him and said, 'Fear nothing. Just as I have for many hundred years stood upon Pundalik's brick, so I shall stay at Dakor always.' 'But', said Ramdas, 'the priests will take you away in the chariot; how can I stop them?' 'Go to them', answered the Lord Krishna, 'and offer for my image its weight in gold. They will agree. Then take your wife's gold nose-ring and put it in the scales. I shall make myself so light that I shall be lighter than the nose-ring.'

... Ramdas did as the Lord Krishna bade him. He told the priests that he had stolen the image, but that he would pay them its weight in gold if they let him keep it. The priests agreed to the bargain. Then Ramdas went to the villagers

and bade them be his witnesses and see that the priests kept their promise. But the villagers laughed at him and said, 'You wretched beggar! What do you mean? You have not enough to eat, much less can you buy images for their weight in gold.' 'Nay,' answered Ramdas, 'you are wrong to call me a beggar. A fool to whom Saraswati imparts her wisdom is no longer a fool. I to whose home the Lord Krishna came, am poor no more.' The villagers laughed at him, but in the end went to see him buy the image. 'If you keep your part of the bargain,' they joked, 'we will see that the priests keep theirs.' They brought a huge pair of scales, and in one scale the priests put the Lord Krishna's image. 'Now bring the gold,' said the priests; and the villagers echoed in derision, 'Yes; go and fetch your gold.' Ramdas went to his house and fetched his wife's nose-ring. He put it into the opposite scale. When the villagers saw what he was doing, they laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. 'Look at his treasure!' they cried. 'He has brought the price of the image ten times over.' But while they laughed, the scale which contained the idol slowly rose from the ground, while that which held the nose-ring sank downwards. For a moment the villagers were silent. Then with changed voices and laughing no more they said, 'A miracle! A miracle! For Ramdas the Lord Krishna has worked a miracle.' They bade the priests go back empty-handed from Dakor. The priests went back to Dwarka and built a new idol there. But Ramdas's image stands at Dakor to this day.

